

# *QUADERNI* D'ITALIANISTICA

*Official Journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies*  
*Revue officielle de la société canadienne pour les études italiennes*

VOLUME XXVII, NO. 1, 2006

*EDITOR — DIRECTEUR*

Konrad Eisenbichler

Victoria College NF 308, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON M5S 1K7, Canada

*BOOK REVIEW EDITOR — RESPONSABLE DE LA RUBRIQUE DES LIVRES*

Corrado Federici

Dept. of Romance Languages, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1, Canada

*MANAGING EDITOR — DIRECTRICE ADMINISTRATIVE*

Manuela A. Scarci

Department of Italian Studies, University of Toronto, Toronto ON M5S 1J6, Canada

*EDITORIAL BOARD — CONSEIL DE RÉDACTION*

Marinella Frescura (*York*)

Elena Rossi (*Victoria*)

Guido Pugliese (*Toronto-Mississauga*)

Anne Urbancic (*Toronto*)

*ADVISORY BOARD — CONSEIL CONSULTATIF*

Antonio Alessio (*Emeritus, McMaster*)

Gaetana Marrone-Puglia (*Princeton*)

Albert Russell Ascoli (*UC-Berkeley*)

Giuseppe Mazzotta (*Yale*)

Luca Codignola (*Genova*)

Gabriele Niccoli (*Waterloo*)

Elvio Guagnini (*Trieste*)

John Picchione (*York*)

Francesco Guardiani (*Toronto*)

Maria Predelli (*McGill*)

Linda Hutcheon (*Toronto*)

Pasquale Sabbatini (*Napoli*)

Christopher Kleinhenz (*Wisconsin-Madison*)

Edoardo Saccone (*Univ. College-Cork*)

Anna Laura Lepschy (*Univ. College-London*)

Ada Testaferri (*York*)

Giulio Lepschy (*Univ. College-London*)

Elissa B. Weaver (*Chicago*)

*DIRECTOR OF — DIRECTEUR DE*

*BIBLIOTECA DI QUARDERNI D'ITALIANISTICA*

Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz (*Toronto*)

*EXECUTIVE OF THE SOCIETY — EXECUTIF DE LA SOCIÉTÉ*

President – Président: Olga Pugliese (*Toronto*)

Vice President – Vice Président : Enrico Vicentini (*Toronto*)

Secretary/Treasurer – Secrétaire/Trésorier : Sandra Parmegiani (*Western Ontario*)

Past President – Président sortant : Vera Golini (*Waterloo*)

Cover : Vinicio Scarci

Typesetting /Tipographie: Legas ([www.legaspublishing.com](http://www.legaspublishing.com))

*Quaderni d'italianistica* is the official journal of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies.

Publication of *Quaderni d'italianistica* is made possible by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

*Quaderni d'Italianistica* est la revue officielle de la Société canadienne pour les études italiennes.

Le Conseil de recherches en sciences humanaines du Canada a accordé une subvention pour la publication de *Quaderni d'italianistica*.

# QUADERNI D'ITALIANISTICA

VOLUME XXVII, NO. 1, 2006

## ARTICOLI

SHERRY ROUSH

- Piagnone Exemplarity and the Florentine Literary Canon  
in the Vita di Girolamo Benivieni.....* 3

PINA PALMA

- Banquets and Power:  
Boiardo's Innamorato and the Politics of Gastronomy.....* 21

LAURA GIANNETTI RUGGIERO

- The Forbidden Fruit or the Taste for Sodomy  
in Renaissance Italy.....* 31

FRANCESCO S. MINERVINI

- Drammaturgia e sacre scritture nell'Età dei Lumi.....* 53

MICHAEL SYRIMIS

- Mona Lisa's Gaze: D'Annunzio, Cinema, and the 'Aura'* ..... 69

TIMOTHY C. CAMPBELL

- Remembering D'Annunzio and Il Duce:  
Modern Prophecy in Italy.....* 89

LUCA POCCI

- Between the Visible and the Invisible:  
Calvino's Cities and Memory.....* 109

## RECENSIONI

- Connell, William J. and Giles Constable. *Sacrilege and Redemption in Renaissance Florence. The Case of Antonio Rinaldeschi*. Essays and Studies 8. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005. Pp. 125  
JACQUELINE MURRAY..... 125

- Colonna, Vittoria. *Poems for Michelangelo. A Bilingual Edition*. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Pp. xxxi, 197.

- KONRAD EISENBICHLER..... 127

<i>Sins of the Flesh. Responding to Sexual Disease in Early Modern Europe</i> , ed. Kevin Siena. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005. Pp. 292.	
CRISTIAN BERCO.....	129
<i>Waddington, Raymond B. Aretino's Satyr Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art</i> . Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 280	
MAUDA BREGOLI-RUSSO.....	131
<i>Agresi, Maria Gaetana, Diamante Medaglia Faini, Aretafila Savini de' Rossi, and Accademia de' Ricovrati. The Contest for Knowledge: Debates over Women's Learning in Eighteenth-Century Italy</i> , ed. and trans. Rebecca Messbarger and Paula Findlen, with an Introduction by Rebecca Messbarger. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Pp. xxxi, 181.	
VANESSA McCARTHY.....	134
<i>McClure, George W. The Culture of Profession in Late Renaissance Italy</i> . Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 373.	
SALLY HICKSON.....	136
<i>Rowland, Ingrid D. The Scarith of Scornello. A Tale of Renaissance Forgery</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Pp. x, 230.	
ADRIANA GRIMALDI.....	138
<i>Carducci, Giosuè and Annie Vivanti. Addio Caro Orco. Lettere e ricordi (1889-1906)</i> . Saggio introduttivo a cura di Anna Folli. Milano: Feltrinelli (Le comete), 2004. Pp. 189	
Vivanti, Annie. <i>Racconti americani</i> . A cura di Carlo Caporossi. Con una nota di Anna Folli. Palermo: Sellerio, 2005. Pp. 166.	
ANNE URBANČIĆ .....	140
CONTRIBUTORS.....	143

# PIAGNONE EXEMPLARITY AND THE FLORENTINE LITERARY CANON IN THE *VITA DI GIROLAMO BENIVIENI*

SHERRY ROUSH

At a sumptuous banquet hosted by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, Girolamo Benivieni (1453-1542)—poet, scholar, and translator—found himself enjoying the witty dinner repartee of the cardinal's engaging and powerful guests.<sup>1</sup> Benivieni, however, differed from his fellow diners in at least one important respect: he openly and unashamedly professed his association with the Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarola. In 1494 Savonarola's supporters had ousted the perceived tyrant Piero de' Medici to set up an unusual republic in Florence.<sup>2</sup> Benivieni had translated various writings by Savonarola and had written some songs for Florentine civic processions and new rituals, such as the "Burning of the Vanities" in 1496 and '97. *Piagnoni*, once an insult given to Savonarola's religious reformists for their copious penitential weeping, became a collective name that adherents, like Girolamo, proudly embraced.

At the table, the conversation began to focus on the civic reforms of the friar's followers, which continued even long after Savonarola was executed.<sup>3</sup> The other dinner guests so criticized Savonarola that they expected

---

<sup>1</sup>I warmly acknowledge and thank Lorenzo Polizzotto for his generous assistance in suggesting better renditions of various passages of the *Vita di Benivieni*, as well as for his expertise in confirming the information presented in note 3. I would also like to thank William Kennedy, Claudia Lazzaro, John Najemy, Carol Kaske, Julia Cozzarelli, and all of the participants of Cornell University's Early Modern colloquium in March 2004 who gave me such constructive feedback on an earlier version of this paper. My thanks, too, go to Penn State colleague Maria Truglio who helped me to acquire a microform copy of Antonio Benivieni's *Vita di Girolamo Benivieni* from the Archivio di Stato in Florence.

<sup>2</sup>During this Republic between 1494 and 1498, Florentines claimed Christ as their king and the Virgin Mary as their queen, but looked to Savonarola for temporal guidance. See the descriptions of *piagnoni* governance by Girolamo Benivieni in *Commento di Hieronymo Benivieni sopra a più sue canzone et sonetti dello Amore et della Belleza Divina*, ff. 111r-112v and 115r-116v, and by Luca Landucci in his *Diario fiorentino*, as well as the critical studies by Donald Weinstein and Polizzotto.

<sup>3</sup>Antonio Benivieni does not provide a date for the banquet. I suspect that the

to force Benivieni to blush with shame. Finally, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, future Pope Clement VII, felt obliged to ask, "Girolamo, voi fate professione di credere al Frate, come può stare l'essere insiememente amico et affezionato nostro?" (Girolamo, you profess to believe in the Friar, [so] how can you also be our friend and intimate? 40v-41r).<sup>4</sup> Benivieni, who is said to have never lacked for a ready response, happily replied in the "manner of Gamaliel to the Scribes":

Monsignore mio, se l'opera del Frate è humana, la si risolverà presto per se stessa; se l'è di Dio, che ché gli homini se ne facciano, l'andrà per certo innanzi. Ma Vossignoria Illustrissima non tema già mai delli amici e devoti del Frate, essi aspettando il miracolo, e che Dio operi, quieti se ne stanno. Guardisi bene ella da alcuni di questi mormoratori inquieti che l'ha d'attorno, i quali, sempre insatiable, non restano o resteranno già mai di travagliare, e nuovi e vasti concetti concependo altrui sollevare per compimento e sfogo dei loro smoderati appetiti. (41r-41v)

[Monsignor mine, if the Friar's work is human, it will resolve itself quickly on its own; but if it is of God, then no matter what men might do, it will move ahead. But your Excellency need not ever fear the Friar's friends and disciples, who quietly await the miracle that God might work. Rather guard yourself well against these dissatisfied whisperers around you who, insatiable, never cease to trouble others with their impious machinations and to vent their excessive appetites.]<sup>5</sup>

With this remark Benivieni silenced the bitter and harsh provocateurs because it was apparent to all that he had "la conscientia più netta di loro, l'ingegnio elevato e la lingua pronta" (41v, "a clearer conscience than they had, as well as lofty genius and quick wit"). The wise cardinal understood only too well Benivieni's words and sagaciously changed the subject of conversation. The author concludes the episode by stating, "Girolamo si fu las-

---

banquet took place in 1522, a date corroborated in a personal correspondence by Polizzotto.

<sup>4</sup>English translations of the *Vita* throughout are mine. In my citations of the Italian text, I have taken the liberty to modernize Benivieni's punctuation and expand his many abbreviations. In this manuscript, "può stare" is written above "accozzate voi," which was stricken by the author.

<sup>5</sup>The reference concerning Gamaliel and the Scribes ("il buon vecchio allegramente e tosto rispose, secondo l'antico motto di Gamaliel alli Scribi") is to Acts 5:34-39, which describes an episode of the envy of authorities toward the popularity of Jesus' apostles. The author thus implies that Girolamo was creating a parallel between Savonarola and Jesus.

cato stare nella sua opinione e natia libertà” (41v, “Girolamo was allowed to keep his own opinion and innate liberty”).

The recounting of this episode is one of the more spirited descriptions in the *Vita di Girolamo Benivieni* by Antonio Benivieni the Younger (1533-98). A careful reading of this and other excerpts from the *Vita* can yield much more, however, than a chuckle at Medici flatterers or memories of the deceased Girolamo Benivieni’s good example. The *Vita* offers a perspective—approximately seventy years after the event described—on one of the primary representatives of *piagnone* ideology, and the subtle complexity of his relationship to both Medicean partisans (known as *palleschi* or *bigi*), as well as on other episodes to proponents of the secular Florentine republic (often called *arrabbiati*).<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this study is to enrich our understanding of the political and cultural relationships during the last decades of the Quattrocento and first decades of the Cinquecento by considering the *Vita*’s import not as biography, but as a document to consider alongside other statements concerning the estimation of literary works and perspectives of the *questione della lingua* at the time. I argue that we have inherited primarily Medicean and secular republican views on these issues from Cristoforo Landino to Niccolò Machiavelli, from Agnolo Poliziano to Giambattista Gelli, and from Lorenzo de’ Medici himself to Francesco Guicciardini. Moreover, these views differ sometimes subtly, sometimes strikingly, from the *piagnone* position. While my focus is on Girolamo Benivieni, further study of his works and reputation may also help us to come to a better understanding of the intellectual and spiritual motivations of other cultural figures who embraced the *piagnone* ethos. Giovanni Pico della

---

<sup>6</sup>Antonio’s retrospective (c. 1580) represents, of course, a late view superimposed on Girolamo’s interpretive contributions during the earlier decades of the Cinquecento. There may be cultural and ideological reasons for writing a work like the *Vita* during the height of the Catholic Reformation—reasons certainly worth pursuing in future studies. On the date of the work’s composition, according to Antonio’s biographer, Caterina Re, it is not possible to date the *Vita* with any more precision: “Quanto alla *Vita di G. Benivieni*, non abbiamo nessun argomento sicuro per determinare l’età in cui fu scritta. Certo non avanti gli ultimi dell’ottavo decennio del secolo o i primi del nono, almeno nelle redazioni da noi conosciute (poichè doveva trovarsi già presso il Benivieni il copista Gonnelli, e questi, vedemmo, si faceva prete nel 1589, e riveduta dopo il 1590” 36). According to biographical studies of both Benivieni by Caterina Re, the Benivieni share largely the same ideological perspective on literature and the *questione della lingua*.

Mirandola and Sandro Botticelli, among others, followed paths similar to Girolamo Benivieni's, flourishing in the artistically and culturally fertile milieu of the Laurentian circle before converting to the radical spiritual life expounded from the pulpit of San Marco.<sup>7</sup>

### *Antonio Benivieni's Vita di Girolamo Benivieni*

Antonio Benivieni the Younger wrote the biography of his great-uncle Girolamo Benivieni, consisting of 72 folios in the Carte Gianni version in the Archivio di Stato in Florence. The unusually long and prominent life of octogenarian Girolamo Benivieni surely deserved biographical treatment. When he published his edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in 1506, Girolamo could claim the distinction, according to Carlo Dionisotti, of being the "maggior poeta in volgare, che a Firenze fosse rimasto" (377, "the greatest vernacular poet still living in Florence"). In addition to the aforementioned *piagnone* songs and translations of Savonarola's works, Benivieni also wrote well received pastoral poetry and recast a Boccaccian novella in verse. Moreover, he surpassed nearly all of his esteemed contemporaries in the study of the Hebrew language.<sup>8</sup> He is buried in the same tomb in San Marco with his dearest friend Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94).

Unfortunately, Antonio's *Vita di Girolamo Benivieni* has very limited value as a biography. In his sometimes exalted language, the adulatory nephew seems almost to have confused Girolamo's life with a *vita di un santo*. One scholar, Luigi Greco, recognized the importance to Dante studies of one section of the *Vita*, republishing in 1897 a brief excerpt as "La difesa di Dante di G. Benivieni." What has yet to be examined, however, is a relatively substantial section of the *Vita* that suggests a kind of *piagnone* literary canon and implicitly maps how some writers' political positions influence their valuation as literary contributors.

Antonio asserts that he writes the *Vita* to present "alla moderna gioventù l'esempio assai fresco di uno prudente cittadino, solenne litterato, ottimo cristiano, e lodevole poeta" (1r, "to today's youth the very recent

---

<sup>7</sup>On Pico, see the biographical studies by Roulier and Jacobelli; for more specific considerations of Botticelli's relationship to the *piagnone* movement, see the studies by Meltzoff and Hatfield. This version differs in certain passages from the copy in BNFII.1.91, pp. 231-278.

<sup>8</sup>Benivieni had earned such high regard for his knowledge of Hebrew that he was asked late in life to make an Italian vernacular translation of the Bible, a task that he never accomplished. See Olga Zorzi Pugliese's study.

example of a prudent citizen, solemn scholar, good Christian, and praiseworthy poet"). Before the reader can learn much else about the actual life of Girolamo Benivieni, however, Antonio unexpectedly launches into an extended consideration of the *questione della lingua* (starting at fol. 2v). He presents Benivieni as understanding long before his peers the dignity of the Florentine vernacular and the potential pitfalls of writing in a language other than the one spoken in everyday exchanges. In fact, the digression—if indeed Antonio's examination of language, literary models, and the differences in literary assessment between Florence and other cities, such as Venice, can be called a digression—continues until fol. 15v, when he is suddenly reminded that his task is to write a biography, at which point he offers a rather sheepish apology:

E qui si farà per avventura meraviglia qualcuno, atteso lo stile di coloro che scrivono le vite altrui, soliti a referire di quel tale, molto sovente ei fece, ei disse, egli andò in quel luogo, ei fu mandato nel cotale, il contrario leggendo al presente di Girolamo. Ei non fece la tal cosa, ei si astenne da quella, ei non si spicçò guari da Firenze, e sia chi di noi anco si faccia beffe, il quale habbia tolto a scrivere di piana e quieta persona. (f. 15v)

[And here perhaps someone will wonder who is accustomed to the style of those who write the lives of others, referring very often to him saying that he did this, he said that, he went here, and was sent there, because presently one reads just the opposite concerning Girolamo. He did not do this, and abstained from that, and he hardly ventured outside Florence. And there may be some who also make fun of us, who have undertaken to write about a simple and quiet person.]

The personal quality that Antonio particularly praises in Benivieni and upholds for emulation by young people of his day is, above all, to “know thyself” (repeated various times throughout the work, including on 2v and 49v). Girolamo is also praised as “affable” (12v), and not afraid to correct others for their trespasses against virtue, such as when he exhorts women not to dress ostentatiously (14r). He shuns the trappings of the sumptuous life (dances, balls, masquerades, etc., 23v-24r). Antonio extols at length the simple life his great-uncle led, including the virtues of simple food, which, he states, is less upsetting to the stomach (16v-17r). In short, according to Antonio's typical exaggeration, Girolamo was “l'esempio della vita modesta, [che] con è ragionamenti accorti et saggi, fu al Mondo utile et buono come viene ragionato del sappientissimo Socrate in Atene” (17v, “the paragon of the modest life, who with his proper and wise thoughts was to the world as useful and good as it is said of the very wise Socrates in

Athens").<sup>9</sup>

By the time Antonio reaches folio 57r, he has so perfected the image of Girolamo as the morally austere, wise old man, who would frequently remark on how grand things were in the days of old, having outlived his age, that even Antonio came to remark: "veduto habbiamo era il canuto e già decrepito Benivieni qualità molto lodevoli e rare" ("we have seen that the white-haired and at this point decrepit Benivieni [had] very praiseworthy and rare qualities").

Savonarola, Luca Landucci, and Girolamo Benivieni himself, among others, praise the qualities of the *piagnone* ideal of virtue and comportment—religious piety, humility, courage to correct others out of Christian charity, simplicity, wisdom, etc. These same ideals are directly attributed to Girolamo in Antonio's *Vita*. The vision of personal liberty—that *innata libertà* that Girolamo was able to preserve in his conversation at the cardinal's dinner table, the freedom to keep his religious beliefs and even to upbraid the other dinner guests for their perceived shortcomings—echoes the freedom of the *piagnoni*, and particularly Savonarola's *fanciulli*, during the height of their influence in the 1490s to rebuke the vices of others:

The *fanciulli* tore a veil off of a young woman's head in Via Martelli, which caused a great disturbance among her relatives. This happened because Fra Girolamo had urged the *fanciulli* to correct people who were wearing inappropriate clothing, and to reprove gamblers. When someone said, 'Here come the Friar's *fanciulli*,' every gambler fled, no matter how bold he might have been, and women went about dressed modestly.<sup>10</sup>

The *piagnone* vision of "innate liberty" is shown to have differed substantially from, for example, that of the *bigi* ladies, strolling around the city wearing their finest fashions, or that of the *arrabbiati* gentlemen playing cards on the main square.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the three political factions insistently

---

<sup>9</sup>Antonio's words frequently contain rich nuances of meaning, as they do here in his comparison of Girolamo to Socrates. Lorenzo de' Medici's circle of artists, scholars, and statesmen promoted Florence as the New Athens and hailed the *rinascimento* of classical culture on the Arno. Antonio certainly emphasizes Girolamo's wisdom and goodness, but he may also be implicitly suggesting the wisdom and appropriateness for authors to act with ideological subtlety in order to survive in the complex Florentine political situation.

<sup>10</sup>From Landucci's *Diario fiorentino*, 7 February 1496, my translation.

<sup>11</sup>Girolamo Benivieni emphasizes the difference between this liberty (of speech and religion) and what he sees as the mere license to display one's immodest dress or gamble on the streets (which, for Benivieni, are acts that do not repre-

claimed different great cities as their model for Florence. *Piagnoni* saw in Florence the rise of a New Jerusalem, while *arrabbiati* sought a New (Republican) Rome and Medici supporters called Florence the “Novella Atene” (New Athens). Just as the *piagnoni* possessed a civic political vision that differed from both Medicean and secular republican platforms, so too, the *Vita* implies, do they possess differing literary assessments.

At the heart of his biography, Antonio presents a genealogy of great Florentine authors. He leaves aside the Three Crowns of Florentine Literature—referring to Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch—because their words alone, he says, are sufficient to ensure their lasting fame (27v, “lasciamo stare la fama dei tre Autori più nobili e principali, di loro medesimi ella parola a bastanza”). He continues:

... ma etiamdio furono innanzi a' questi Ser Brunetto Latini, e Guido Cavalcanti, e alcuni altri bastici mostrare come sempre si hereditarono le Muse a Firenze, che seguito a Dante, Fazio degli Uberti, al Petrarca, il suo buon discepolo fra Luigi Marsilij, il quale in divinità sentì molto e molto, hebbeci Coluccio Salutati, rettorico e oratore, Dino Frescobaldi Poeta, le rime de' quali ancora in tanta chiarezza e copia moderna sono pure in qualche considerazione e pregio, hebbeci messer Francesco da Barberino, Luca da Panzano e altri Scrittori, Matteo Palmieri, Gianozzo Manetti, il Marsupino, e il Landino, e produsse alla fine questo Paese quel aria di scienzie, quel vaso di santità così vigilante e provido Pastore l'Arcivescovo (Santo) Antonino, ma di questi così fatti non fa mestiero a noi particolarmente referire al presente, e ci basti haver conchiuso come ha successivamente Fiorenza generati fervidi ingegni (28r-v).

[But before these (three) there were also Ser Brunetto Latini and Guido Cavalcanti and some others who suffice to show us how the muses always were inherited in Florence, for Fazio degli Uberti followed Dante, Petrarch was followed by his good disciple Fra Luigi Marsili, who in the-

---

sent personal liberty, but rather, personal licentiousness). In his book, Polizzotto (250) presents another report of Benivieni's response to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici during the same dinner described in this study's opening pages. It is from Jacopo Pitti's *Dell'Istoria fiorentina*, 123, and also emphasizes the notion of liberty (in this case *libertà comune*): “Io non niego, monsignore illustrissimo, di non essere de' seguaci del Frate, ed insieme con tutti gli uomini dabbene di questa città, desiderare la libertà comune, ma nè io, nè coloro faranno per tal conto felonìa, nè verranno con le armi contro allo stato giammai: pregheremo bene Dio e voi, che ne la conceda.” These notions of liberty are probably rearticulations of the *piagnoni*'s oft repeated “santa libertà” (holy liberty), discussed in detail in Polizzotto's first chapter “Holy Liberty: The Establishment of a Political Tradition, 1494-1498” (8-53).

ology perceived very much indeed. There was Coluccio Salutati, rhetorician and orator, and the poet Dino Frescobaldi, whose poems are still considered today and praised for their clarity and copiousness. There was Messer Francesco da Barberino, Luca da Panzano, and other writers, Matteo Palmieri, Gianozzo Manetti, il Marsupino and Landino. In the end this country produced that air of sciences, that vessel of such vigilant sanctity and prudent priest Archbishop Saint Antoninus. But it is not our specific task to speak at this moment of these aforementioned people. It is enough for us to have shown how Florence generated a sequence of such lively geniuses.]

There is a brief parenthesis for mention of “foreigners”—that is, non-Florentine Italians – worthy of praise. Among these, Antonio singles out Leonardo Bruni d’Arezzo and Poggio Bracciolini. His catalogue of exemplary figures then culminates in: “Donato Acciaiuolo, il gran Platonico Ficino, messer Marcello Virgilio, Bartolomeo Scala, i Medici, Angelo Politiano, Conte della Mirandola, questi lo splendore di ogni altro offusava sicuramente, e per ultimo, non so s’io mi debba dire per sua o nostra grazia o disgratia, il Girolamo Padre Savonarola”<sup>12</sup> [29-rv, “Donato Acciaiuolo, the great Platonist Ficino, Messer Marcello Virgilio, Bartolomeo Scala, the Medici, Angelo Politiano, and the Count of Mirandola, whose splendour certainly obscured all others. Finally, I do not know if I should say by his or our grace or misfortune, Father Girolamo Savonarola].

In other words, this list departs from the Three Crowns and a couple of their forerunners to name those writers—mostly Florentines or, like Pico, writers who were closely associated with Florence—who in Antonio’s opinion most deserved lasting fame. There are also in this list some notable exclusions, such as Luigi Pulci or (in a list of Florentine authors, not all of whom are specifically poets) Niccolò Machiavelli, to mention only two examples. In other words, what Antonio Benivieni has done is to pass literary judgments through praise or exclusion, and to spell out for us a kind of rudimentary literary canon.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>This passage is particularly difficult to read and contains various autograph cancellations. For example, Antonio had written “avventura,” crossed it out, and wrote “grazia” above it in the phrase “per sua o nostra grazia o disgratia.” He also abbreviated “Girolamo” by writing “G.” It is unclear if he kept “G. Padre Savonarola” (which would be unusual syntax) or if he crossed out “G.,” intending simply “il Padre Savonarola.”

<sup>13</sup>Of course, Antonio Benivieni does not use the term “canon,” but it is perhaps not coincidental that this term comes into use in contexts beyond scriptural and legalistic ones around the time when Antonio’s work begins to circulate.

So, what kind of writers does Antonio Benivieni praise in the *Vita*? Most notably, he does not separate in his estimation personal ethos from authorial prowess. Antonio appears to emphasize a certain brand of religious or ethical commitment, specifically one that highly favours *piagnone* sensibilities. Not surprisingly, Savonarola receives a special place in his catalogue. Saint Antoninus is also a choice unique to *piagnoni* for inclusion in a canon of great Florentine authors. The archbishop of Florence is best known for his Latin works, the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Chronicon*, but he also penned works in the vernacular, including a *Libretto della dottrina cristiana per i putti piccoli e giovanetti*, an *Opera a ben vivere*, and a *Regola di vita cristiana*. One of his great credits in Florentine civic life, moreover, is the installation of the reformed Dominicans in the convent of San Marco, which would become the heart of *piagnone* circles.<sup>14</sup> The writings of the Medici, particularly Lorenzo the Magnificent, but also those of Lorenzo's mother Lucrezia Tornabuoni, belong to literary canons of various ideological stripes; in this context, however, it is difficult to forget that Medici patronage largely financed San Marco. Fra Luigi Marsili's perceptivity in theology earns special mention, alongside many writers who underscored an ethical imperative in their literary works (Salutati, Palmieri, Manetti), those who were informed by the desire for ethically minded juridical reforms (Barberino), as well as authors whose religious piety comes to define their literary production (Uberti and Poliziano). Pico, whose splendour outshines all others, according to Antonio, was among the self-proclaimed disciples of Savonarola and was even buried in the Dominican habit.

Dante also serves as a particularly strong model for these writers (Uberti, Barberino, Palmieri) or for his commentators (Manetti and Landino). In fact, according to Antonio, Dante is a touchstone for understanding Girolamo Benivieni as well as for understanding the differing civic attitudes in the *questione della lingua* represented in the *Vita*. Girolamo was a preeminent defender of Dante during a period when Petrarchism was particularly strong, as evidenced by his divulgation of Antonio Manetti's commentary on Dante's *Inferno*, his 1506 edition of the *Commedia*, and the proemial "Cantico in laude di Dante" he composed and published along with this edition.<sup>15</sup>

Antonio's catalogue is reminiscent of other Florentine literary

---

<sup>14</sup>On the life of St. Antoninus, see R. Morçay.

<sup>15</sup>For more information on the "Cantico," see my study "Dante as *Piagnone* Prophet: Girolamo Benivieni's 'Cantico in laude di Dante' (1506)."

“canons,” perhaps most notably Cristoforo Landino’s in his *Proemio* to the 1481 edition of Dante’s *Commedia*. In it, Landino’s lofty rhetoric promoted Florence’s greatest assets and her most illustrious citizens, including the models of doctrine, eloquence, art, architecture, and music. The proem has received keen critical interpretation already by Ames-Lewis, Lentzen, and Rachel Jacoff, especially in light of its ideological agenda. According to Lentzen, in exposing the recondite Platonic meaning of Dante’s poem, Landino effectively makes Dante a hero for the ideals of Medicean Florence (41-42).

It makes little sense to talk about *piagnone* ideals before the rise of Girolamo Savonarola’s popularity in the early 1490s. However, when *piagnone* intellectuals begin to assert, for instance, new models for literary emulation, they are arguing against ideological positions that were established before the 1490s, such as Landino’s 1481 catalogue of Florence’s greatest vernacular writers. Temporal contextualization gets even trickier. In 1481, for instance, our *piagnone* representative, Girolamo Benivieni, was himself part of Landino’s intellectual circle consisting of Medicean intellectuals and artists of the *Accademia*. In fact, ideological alliances involve ever-changing shifts and compromises, sometimes strikingly so, in relatively brief periods of time.<sup>16</sup> Here one could cite many examples. Some republicans side with the Medici when other families or factions appear overly strong, but then repay the Medici at their height with the same coin. Alamanno Rinuccini enjoyed some Medici favours, but produced violently anti-Medicean writings against “laurenziana...tirannide,” particularly in the 1479 dialogue *On Liberty*, which praised the Pazzi conspiracy (Martelli, 180). Rinuccini’s republican stance echoes to some

---

<sup>16</sup>Indeed, these ideological tensions are not limited to the times of just Girolamo and Antonio Benivieni, either. According to Claudio Varese, “Dal tumulto dei Ciompi al rogo di Savonarola, Firenze visse una continua crisi... Da Giovanni Cavalcanti, che, mediceo, diventa poi antimediceo, e lamenta gli intrighi e la crudeltà di Cosimo, a Vespasiano da Bisticci cliente della casa dominante, alla quale non risparmia elogi, ma pronto a ricordare che le repubbliche muoiono quando non vi fioriscono uomini eccellenti e singolari, e quando vanno in esilio cittadini come Palla Strozzi, non certo inferiore per gusto, potenza mercenatizia, sapienza e prudenza civile a Cosimo de’ Medici; dalla prudenza di Giovanni Morelli, che consiglia ai suoi discendenti di non occuparsi dello Stato, di accettare sempre il parere del Palagio, e tutte le signorie, meno quella del popolo minuto, allo stesso Leon Battista Alberti, che vagheggia nel *De iciarchia* il buon tiranno, e nel terzo libro *Della famiglia* diffida, con borghese buon senso, di chi si occupa di politica —nella storiografia e nei memorialisti fiorentini, in forma diretta o indiretta, la coscienza di quella crisi continua” (x-xi).

extent Giovanni Cavalcanti's earlier position, represented by the highly critical remarks of Cosimo de' Medici's opponents Niccolò da Uzzano and Rinaldo degli Albizzi in his *Istorie fiorentine*, then he fiercely attacks Cosimo and his supporters in his Second Chronicle. There is also some indication that in 1494, after Piero de' Medici was driven from Florence, Francesco Filarete, a participant in the Medicean Platonic Academy, composed a "Della rinnovazione della libertà." Other writers, like Girolamo Benivieni, moved from Medici support to *piagnone* devotion. Ugolino Verino, for instance, dedicated his *Paradisus* to Lorenzo de' Medici, having enjoyed Medicean favour for many years, then, in 1491, embracing the *piagnone* ethos late in life, dedicated his *Carmen* to Savonarola. Still others, like Luca Landucci, shifted their loyalties from *piagnone* sympathy to the Medici after the profound delusions of Savonarola's perceived failures; after 1512 Landucci's diary indicates particularly strong support and praise for the Medici.

In the study of canon formation and the *questione della lingua*, we are accustomed to think about "political," "ideological," or "patriotic" positions in terms of the dialectic of Florentines versus "foreigners," that is, non-Florentine Italians. Landino's 1481 edition of the *Commedia* was the Florentine response to Milanese and Venetian commentaries on Dante. Benivieni's 1506 edition of the *Commedia* was the Florentine response to Pietro Bembo's scholarship. Later, much closer to Antonio Benivieni's time, Paolo Cortesi's work or Marcantonio Sabellico's work was seen as the foreign attack that was to prompt Benedetto Varchi's Florentine response, and so forth. It is true that when faced with foreign attack on literary matters, Florentines tended to rally together behind the names of their greatest authorial models, especially the Three Crowns. In fact, writers from as different ideological stripes as the Medicean Giannozzo Manetti in the 1440s, the Mirandolan-Florentine *piagnone* Giovanfrancesco Pico in 1512, and the republican Niccolò Machiavelli circa 1515, all claimed Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch as the glory of the Florentine language and literature.<sup>17</sup>

The problem with the Florentine versus foreigner dialectic is, however, that it does not take into consideration notable differences among the Florentines in the selection of other literary models. In his essay "Histories of Literature in the Quattrocento" M.L. McLaughlin argues that "there

---

<sup>17</sup> Incidentally, Florence's ability to claim the Three Crowns is a fine example of the strength of Florentine propaganda. Of the three, only Dante was born in Florence; and none of the three died or was buried there. Furthermore, all three enjoyed their most felicitous periods of literary composition outside Florence's city walls.

were what amounted to two factions of humanists in Florence around 1460" (73-74). At the head of one faction, was Iohannes Argyropoulos (1410-90), who "encouraged a more sympathetic approach to scholastic philosophy"; at the head of the other, hostile to scholastic Latin that was "devoid of rhetorical ornament," was Landino. As McLaughlin traces his argument, however, it becomes increasingly clear that the ideological division falls largely along political lines, with republicans like Rinuccini supporting Argyropoulos, and Lorenzo and Alberti sustaining the Medicean Landino. After the 1490s, this dualistic understanding of cultural tensions is further complicated by the *piagnone* perspective.

In Antonio's *Vita*, a number of authors are mentioned who also appear in ideologically competing catalogues. Some are unique to the *piagnoni*, most notably Fra Luigi Marsili, Fra Girolamo Savonarola, and St. Antoninus. Mediceans, including Landino and Poliziano, and secular republicans, such as Machiavelli and Gelli, do not make any mention of these three figures' authorial contributions. Moreover, when Medicean or republican writers cite authors from Antonio's catalogue, they are typically not as interested in the authors' "good discipleship" and "perception in theology," or whether the writers contributed to a "period of vigilant sanctity." These are the kinds of phrases that *piagnoni* associate with their authorial models, thus basing their assessments of literary merit on the individuals' moral character as well as on the outcome—in terms of spiritual *renovatio* in the community—of the writers' contributions.

For the Medicean perspective, Lorenzo the Magnificent himself offers extended considerations of literary vernacular models in his *Commentary on My Sonnets*, but also in the *Raccolta Aragonese*, an anthology of vernacular poetry that he commissions as a gift for Frederick of Aragon (1452-1504), son of the king of Naples. This last work, completed by 1477 and prefaced by Poliziano, presents a kind of canon of vernacular writers up to that time that is still largely accepted today. Selected for inclusion in the anthology are poets of the *scuola siciliana* such as Jacopo da Lentini and Pier delle Vigne, as well as intermediary poets such as Bonagiunta da Lucca, the *stilnovisti* Guittone d'Arezzo, Guido Guinizzelli, Guido Cavalcanti, Dante, and Cino da Pistoia, and, of course, Petrarch. Most importantly, however, the anthology is constructed in such a way that it culminates in examples of Lorenzo's own poetry. Poliziano's comparison in the prefatory letter between the literature of ancient Greece and contemporary Florence argued for the illustriousness of the vernacular language at the same time that it implied a rebirth in the Golden Age of literature in Florence.

Other Medicean authors, such as Landino, reconfirmed key figures from this catalogue and added other recent names: Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, Leon Battista Alberti, and Matteo Palmieri, among others. Another Medicean, Naldo Naldi, chose to emphasize those writers closest to him (Lorenzo de' Medici and Marsilio Ficino) for his encomia. Mediceans, therefore, viewed earlier “foreign” vernacular contributions as Florence’s rightful literary inheritance and as a preparation for their own accomplishments. Mediceans claimed for their city particular favour from the Muses and linked, as closely as possible, civic political power with literary and cultural brilliance.

When we move to consider the republican perspective, at times it can seem as if the distinctions are not terribly pronounced. However, the republican focus tends to fall much more on the question of language, than on valuations of writers based on their moral or philosophic substance. Machiavelli, in his *Dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*, praises three Florentine authors as part of his linguistic considerations. But he plays it safe by limiting his praise only to Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. In his *Ragionamento sopra le difficoltà di mettere in regole la nostra lingua* (1551), Giovan Battista Gelli relates a conversation with Cosimo Bartoli in which Bartoli requests that Gelli write a work that offers the rules for beautiful Florentine speech and writing. The models for this language of “parole scelte e facili...naturale dolcezza... e un certo che di grandezza e di nobiltà” (465, “choice and fluent words, natural sweetness, and something of greatness and nobility”) were many of the most prominent republicans, including Piero Soderini, who was Gonfaloniere during the times that Gelli wistfully remembers. Among the “other literati who used to gather at that time in the garden of the Rucellai” he lists “Bernardo Rucellai, Francesco da Diacceto, Giovanni Canacci, Giovanni Corsi, Piero Martelli, Francesco Vettori ...Piero Soderini...Marcello Virgilio...Ruberto Acciaiuoli e Luigi Guicciardini” (465). Gelli’s catalogue is a veritable roll call of the Who’s Who of republican intellectual models at this time. The frequency with which Gelli repeats the phrase “Dotti” o “Literati de’ Rucellai” seems also almost to want to lend to the group the status of an *Accademia Medicea*.

### Civic Attitudes in the *Questione della lingua*.

The canonization of vernacular literary models depends on a particular valorization of the Florentine language. According to Antonio, Girolamo purposefully chose to write in the Florentine vernacular because he was one of the few Florentines to recognize in the language the “Treasure” his city pos-

sessed (“Tesoro che haveva in seno”; 2v). Antonio upbraids the Florentines of Girolamo’s time for more readily chasing after the ruins of Rome than refining her own language, given what he calls “the strong imaginings of that time that attention be paid only to Latin Authors” (“essendo forte immaginatione a quel tempo, che solamente dei Latini Autori si dovesse curare”; 2v-3r). Antonio proceeds to bewail the critical judgment of the time when he states:

da più reputavano coloro meno intelligibili, più rozzi erano e più orridi, credendo che, quanto manco si lasciavano intendere li Autori, tanto più Latini fossero, et non hebbero essi per certo intorno ai Volgari dicatori, se alcuni pure ne degnarano, molto migliore giudicio, coloro da più reputando, quali più della durezza e peregrinità fossero stati vaghi. (2v-3r)

[they thought more of those (authors) who were less intelligible, more uncouth and horrendous, thinking that the less one could understand of those Authors, the more ‘Latin’ they were. Moreover, they certainly did not have the (same esteem) for writers in the Vernacular, though some were more worthy of better judgment. Instead they held those (Authors) in higher esteem who were more prone to incomprehensibility and foreignness.]

So great was the temptation to write in Latin that, cried Antonio, “Dante stesso, il quale era pur nato per fare conto e pretioso al Mondo il nostro pulito Idioma fu talmente invitato e si trovava si fattamente trapreso da questa reputazione della Romana lingua che vicino ne fu a comporre il suo nobile Poema Latinamente. Miseri noi, se in ciò Dante durava” (4r, “Dante himself, who was born to make our pristine language known and appreciated to the World, was so drawn and so taken by the reputation of the Latin language that he was close to composing his Poem in Latin. Wretched us if Dante had persisted in that!).

According to Antonio, Girolamo held the Florentine vernacular in such high esteem, however, because he believed that “in tutte le cose la Natura vince[re] l’artifitio” (4v, “in all things Nature surpasses artifice”). This is to say, that writers succeed when they follow what Mother Nature teaches and informs intrinsically through the various generations of writers, and not by imitating others. Florentines cannot write more perfectly in Latin than they can in their native Florentine, nor can foreigners (that is, non-Florentine Italians) mimic Florentine more perfectly than the Florentines themselves. By the same token, Girolamo believed that those Florentine writers who insisted on writing in Latin were more “rude” because they were not composing in the language that came naturally to

them. Antonio portrays Girolamo as bucking a trend when he wrote in Florentine, rather than in the Latin language then in vogue.

On the subject of the *questione*, non-Florentine Italians receive from Antonio both praise and blame. On the one hand, when the Florentine language came to be understood by foreigners they began to model their compositions with greater judgment and more subtlety on Florentine writings. Some of the foreigners, Antonio stated, actually “risuscitandoci gli ammaestramenti di parlare e di scrivere regolatamente” (5v, “resuscitated for us the rules of writing [the Florentine vernacular] and speaking it properly”). He continues:

Dunque ci furono da Vinegia, non molto dopo, e da Padova mandate le regole con le quali i Fiorentini antichi havevano parlato e scritto, e noi il dovevamo, volendo e l'uno e l'altro debitamente fare, se l'ordine dei tempi a Girolamo conceduto havesse il potersi meglio valere di queste osservazioni, o se lo havere a combattere, con la ruvidezza della sua età, con la basezza dell'i strambotti, con la ostinatione dei rigorosi gramatici, luogo e tempo lasciatoli havesse di potere meglio a quelle pensare, più chiaro egli, più cari e più pregiati ne sarieno gli scritti suoi di dotti gravi e pietosi concetti. (6r)

[not long thereafter, the rules with which ancient Florentines spoke and wrote—and in which we ought to speak and write, if we want to do either properly—were sent to us from Venice and then from Padua. If the quality of the times given to Girolamo had allowed him to appreciate better these observations, or if he had not had to struggle with the rudeness of his times, with the baseness of the *strambotti*,<sup>18</sup> with the obstinacy of rigorous grammarians, if he had been given the time and space to think more profoundly about these rules, he would have been clearer and his writings would have been rendered more worthy and more distinguished by wise and pious concepts.]

On the other hand, in the linguistic assessments of Dante by Ricordano, Villani, and others who object to some of the poet's words on the basis of how they sound to the ear, Antonio sees an example of a wrong-headed attitude that privileges the sweetness of the sound over the substance of the meaning: “‘epa, mora e Croia, Satura, rimproccio, redotto, battifolle’...et somiglianti, deh! perché questa schifiltà ci piglia solo per Dante, se allora così rigido non era il giuditio, divenuto poi superbissimo, delle orecchie?’” (Greco, 515; “‘epa, mora and Croia, Satura, rimproccio, redotto, battifolle’... and other words like that, alas! why is Dante alone

---

<sup>18</sup>The *strambotto* is a popular verse form, not one considered noble or elevated.

being blamed for them when at that time the judgement of the ear had not become so mighty”).<sup>19</sup>

In sum, Antonio contributes to the understanding of the difference in Florentine and Venetian evaluations of poetic merit. For Florentine *intenditori* like Girolamo Benivieni, that merit rests on the ethical or moral virtue of the poet, while for foreigners like Pietro Bembo it rests on the lyrical beauty, the sweetness of sound, the purity of expression, and the harmony of poetic concepts. The two positions are not entirely mutually exclusive, but Girolamo’s view certainly favours ethics over aesthetics, while Bembo’s, for instance, privileges aesthetics over ethics. Florentines thus interpret Dante’s intention for writing the *Commedia* as a calling on the reader to “mutare la vita cattiva in buona” (Greco, 513; “change one’s wicked life to follow the good path”), the same impetus that Antonio claims for presenting Girolamo’s life in the first place.

Ultimately, the literary and linguistic views that Antonio attributes to Girolamo Benivieni in the *Vita* differ substantially from those of more prominent Florentines with significantly different political agendas, such as Machiavelli or Gelli, or non-Florentines, such as Cortesi or Bembo. Consideration of this unique *piagnone* view, which, co-existed in sometimes politically tense or puzzling ways—as is evident in the description of the conversation at Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici’s dinner gathering—provides another crucial piece in the complex puzzle of nascent theories of literature in the Florentine vernacular and their ideological and political underpinnings.

Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, PA

#### *Cited Works*

##### *Manuscript Sources*

Benivieni, Antonio, il Giovane. *Vita di Girolamo Benivieni*. Archivio di Stato, Florence. Archivio Leonetti Mannucci Gianni, Codice 43. 72 folios.

##### *Printed Sources*

Alighieri, Dante. *La commedia di Dante Alighieri*, ed. Cristoforo Landino. Florence: Nicolo di Lorenzo della Magna, 1481.  
—. *Le terze rime di Dante: Lo 'nferno, e 'l Purgatorio e 'l Paradiso*, ed. Pietro Bembo. Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1502.

---

<sup>19</sup> Greco also cites this passage (515).

- . *Commedia di Dante Alighieri insieme con uno dialogo circa el sito, forma et misure dello Inferno*, ed. Girolamo Benivieni. Florence: Filippo di Giunta, 1506. [also contains the “Cantica in laude di Dante”]
- Ames-Lewis, Francis. “Early Medicean Devices” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 42 (1979): 122-43.
- Barbi, Michele. *Della fortuna di Dante nel secolo XVI*. Pisa: Nistri, 1890.
- Baron, Hans. *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966 [1955].
- Benivieni, Girolamo. *Commento di Hieronymo Benivieni a più sue cantone et sonetti dello Amore et della Belleza Divina*. Florence: Antonio Tubini, Lorenzo (de Alopo) Veneziano e Andrea Ghirlandi, 1500.
- . *Opere*. Florence: Filippo di Giunta, 1519.
- Brown, Alison. “Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence and its Contribution to Early Modern Political Thought” *The Journal of Modern History* 58:2 (1986): 383-413.
- . “Savonarola, Machiavelli, and Moses: A Changing Model” vol. 2, pp. 57-72 in *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein*, eds. Peter Denley and Caroline Elam. London: Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies, 1988.
- Dionisotti, Carlo. “Dante nel Quattrocento” pp. 333-78 in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Danteschi*. A cura della Società Dantesca Italiana e dall’Associazione Internazionale per gli Studi di Lingua e Letteratura Italiana. Florence: Sansoni, 1965.
- Garin, Eugenio. “Dante nel Rinascimento.” *Rinascimento* 7 (1967, 2<sup>nd</sup> series): 3-28.
- Gelli, Giovan Battista. *Opere*, ed. Ireneo Sanesi. Turin: UTET, 1952.
- Greco, Luigi. “La difesa di Dante di G. Benivieni” *Giornale dantesco* n.s. 5 (1897): 509-18.
- Hatfield, Rab. “Botticelli’s *Mystic Nativity*, Savonarola and the Millennium” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995): 88-114.
- Jacobelli, Jader. *Pico della Mirandola*. Milan: Longanesi, 1986.
- Jacoff, Rachel. “Charles Eliot Norton’s ‘Medicean Dante’” *Harvard Literary Bulletin* n.s. 5:3 (1994): 45-52.
- Landucci, Luca. *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516 continuato da un anonimo fino al 1542*, ed. Iodoco del Badia. Florence: Sansoni, 1883.
- Lentzen, Manfred. “Le lodi di Firenze di Cristoforo Landino” *Romanische Forschungen* 97.1 (1985): 36-46.
- McLaughlin, M. L. “Histories of Literature in the Quattrocento” pp. 63-80 in *The Language and Literature in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Peter Hainsworth, Valerio Lucchesi, Christina Roaf, David Robey, and J.R. Woodhouse. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Meltzoff, Stanley. *Botticelli, Signorelli and Savonarola: Theologia Poetica and Painting from Boccaccio to Poliziano*. Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1987.
- Morçay, R. *Saint Antonin archevêque de Florence (1389-1459)*. Paris: Gabalda, 1914.

- Pitti, Jacopo. *Dell'Istoria fiorentina. Archivio storico italiano*. 1<sup>st</sup> ser. 1 (1842): i-liii, 1-480 pp.
- Polizzotto, Lorenzo. *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Pugliese, Olga Zorzi. "Girolamo Benivieni: umanista riformatore (dalla corrispondenza inedita)" *Bibliofilia* 72.3 (1970): 253-88.
- Re, Caterina. *Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino: Cenni sulla vita e sulle opere*. Città di Castello: S. Lapi,, 1906.
- . *Un poeta tragico fiorentino della seconda metà del Secolo XVI: Antonio Benivieni il Giovane*. Venice: Orfanotrofio di A. Pellizzato, 1905.
- Roulier, Fernand. *Jean Pic de la Mirandole (1463-1494), Humaniste, philosophe et théologien*. Geneva: Slatkine, 1989.
- Roush, Sherry. "Dante as *Piagnone* Prophet: Girolamo Benivieni's 'Cantico in laude di Dante' (1506)" *Renaissance Quarterly* 55 (2002): 49-80.
- . *Hermes' Lyre: Italian Poetic Self-Commentary from Dante to Tommaso Campanella*. Toronto and London: The University of Toronto Press, 2002.
- Tanturli, Giuliano. "Proposta e risposta: La prolusione petrarchesca del Landino e il codice cavalcantiano di Antonio Manetti" *Rinascimento* 32 (1992): 213-25.
- The Three Crowns of Florence: Humanist Assessments of Dante, Petrarcha, and Boccaccio*, eds. David Thompson and Alan F. Nagel. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972.
- Varese, Claudio, "Introduzione" pp. vii-xviii in *Prosatori volgari del '400*, ed. Claudio Varese. Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1955.
- Vespasiano da Bisticci. *Renaissance Princes, Popes & Prelates: The Vespasiano Memoirs. Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century*, trans. William George and Emily Waters. Intro. Myron P. Gilmore. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963 [1926].
- Weinstein, Donald. *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

BANQUETS AND POWER:  
BOIARDO'S *INNAMORATO* AND THE POLITICS OF  
GASTRONOMY

PINA PALMA

Power shapes people's social and political consciousness and, although it rarely reflects a consciousness of self, it is ever mindful of the privileged modes to which it is entitled. It can be displayed through a variety of means, all of which are a deliberate expression and consolidation of grandeur and authority. Foodstuffs as a socio-political metaphor lend itself quite naturally as a tool carving social identity. Aristotle in his *Politics* (1256a) characterizes the consumption of different foodstuffs in terms of the dissimilar "ways of life" that it produced. The terms of his argument appear inverted in the Renaissance when sophisticated lifestyles were believed to require the consumption of refined food. As we know from extant treatises, the culture and mentality of self-indulgent court life favoured a diet based on rare delicacies elaborately prepared. This type of dietary conventions defined social identity and, by emphasizing cultural divisions and social hierarchy, it effectively conferred a status-building trait to gastronomy. For this reason, the staging of stupendous banquets in Renaissance Italy became another vehicle to express princely power. Through these lavish productions that ensured self-aggrandizement, princes marked social as well as religious events, political alliances, and special loyalties.

For these occasions professional cooks transformed exotic ingredients into delicate morsels and elaborate dishes that suited the sophisticated palates of the upper class. Exquisite concoctions, prepared according to dietetic norms dispensed by highly regarded court doctors and humanists, translated the host's power into gastronomic spectacles that validated, and even magnified, his grandeur. As a coded but calculated language of persuasion food ingratiated the host to the guests, and this, in turn, enabled him to seize opportunities and capitalize on the advantages that the perception entailed. The political overlay superimposed to these convivial gatherings cannot be ignored, for it is precisely because of the political implications that food transmits through its "metaphorical or symbolic qualities," that banquets turned the host's private ambitions into public spectacles. These elaborately choreographed gastronomic manoeuvres daz-

zled the guests and cemented the host's shrewdness and credibility, though not necessarily his competence and integrity as a leader.

The banquet staged in 1473 by Sisto IV's nephews Giuliano della Rovere and Pietro Riario to welcome Eleonora D'Aragona in Rome is a cogent illustration of gastronomic politics. Riario took intense interest to ensure that before departing for Ferrara, where she was to become the wife of Ercole I, Eleonora and the duke's envoys, with Matteo Maria Boiardo among them, were entertained with unprecedented magnificence. In the house he erected in her honour near the Church of the Holy Apostles, Cardinal Riario's wealth, power, and sophistication were meticulously displayed. Splendid furnishings, new theatrical representations and an opulent banquet left their mark on his prestigious guests (Pastor, 241-244). Letters written by ambassadors, as well as by Eleonora herself, corroborate Riario's reputation as a powerful and astute statesman. That Riario transformed the banquet into a formidable political manoeuvre is confirmed by the successful achievement of his immediate objective: offering a public display of the pope's alliance with the Aragonese king and, of course, Duke Ercole, while simultaneously casting off the Orsini and Medici families. By astutely turning the political discourse into one of gastronomic seduction and, at the same time, by fusing the two into one ingenious triumph, Cardinal Riario gave new meaning to the Renaissance understanding of political strategizing. His deliberate substitution of a symbolically rich meal to a series of predictable political gestures demonstrated Riario's uncanny awareness of the possibilities offered by commensal diplomacy. He showed, among other things, that to influence people of power, diplomatic skilfulness must rely on, and permeate, every social activity in which those people took pleasure. At the same time, however, his act demonstrated that if on the one hand eating at his table signalled the renewal of papal-Aragonese diplomatic relations, it, on the other hand, also denoted the moral and ethical shortcomings of the parties partaking of the meal. The Cardinal's banquet, as a carefully conceived means to promote papal interests, served as a stage for the porous and ambivalent relationship between the pope's power and the fickle nature of his political alliances, but left no space for Christian ethical values.

The three-course menu included stags roasted whole in their skins, goats, hares, calves, herons, peacocks with their feathers, and a bear: ostentatious dishes for a self-conscious group. Meats were served covered in silver and innumerable sweets and confectionary shaped into artistic tableaux intended to stir and conquer the onlookers' imagination ensured the triumph of appearance. However, despite—or perhaps because of—its adher-

ence to the aristocratic culinary code, the far-reaching political implications of Riario's banquet served more as an attack on his enemies than as a praise of his new allies. An illustration of this is the bear meat. Prized for its rarity rather than its nutritional qualities – because, according to the Galenic humoral theory, it “is not good for spleen or liver” and “generates all kinds of indigestible residue,” as Platina's *De Honesta voluptate et valetudine* explains (Platina, 236-237) – this animal implicitly evokes not only the hunt for, but especially the overpowering of a fiercely untamed force. The political message couched in the spectacle of a bear reduced to a meal could also call to mind the powerful Orsini family,<sup>1</sup> the pope's embittered rivals, linked by marriage to the Medici. Playing both on the homonymy and the meat's symbolic value, Riario insinuated the idea of the Orsini's subjugation and downfall so that his guests could foretaste, savour in fact, the political and economic results of such political a feat. Platina's treatise emphasizes the weakness of the bear's head and contrasts it to the strength of the lion's. Accordingly, Riario's presentation of a “conquered” bear enhanced, by contrast, the leonine power that the Della Rovere, Aragonese, and Este families embodied. This bold act of gastronomic politics, suggesting that even untamed nature could be reduced to submissiveness through resolute forces, in fact literally and metaphorically swallowed, could hardly escape Riario's guests.

In the *Orlando Innamorato* the interplay between power and banquets emerges in the very first canto of the poem. As he presides over a Pentecost banquet surrounded by his knights, Charlemagne incarnates power. A truce he has declared for the occasion allows the Saracens to partake of the meal. The symbolism of Pentecost, recalling the Holy Spirit that—during a meal—emboldened and empowered the apostles to speak in foreign tongues and sway non-believers by proclaiming the new covenant, is here ostensibly retrieved through Charles' invitation to the Saracens. The image of enemies sharing food infuses a symbolic value of sacredness into the scene and imbues it with the notion of power that transcends—and unites—warring factions. This power, which has the capacity to suspend momentarily the reality of war and gather enemies at the same table, effectively redraws the boundaries of Charles' authority and relegates the Saracens to a position of passive power. Although on the battlefield they personify the force that opposes Charles, at the banquet, as his guests, they temporarily if unwittingly recast themselves in the role of his deferential subjects while he, paradoxically, assumes that of their sovereign because of

---

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Giuseppe Mazzotta for first suggesting this possibility.

the food he provides. By temporarily turning into the “nourishing emperor,” fusing chivalric largesse with seeming Christian generosity, Charles, like Riario, forges a link between food and peace that conceals the chasm between the host’s misleading generosity and the guests’ indebtedness.

As the gastronomic translation of his power, Charles’ banquet brings the stranger, the “other,” the adversary into the fold, transforming it into the familiar, friendly commensal. In their temporary transformation the Saracens are juxtaposed to the impermanence that food represents. “Finissime vivande” in fact require creating something new from old forms and hinges on the process of transforming even decayed ingredients into something appetizingly fresh and new. Ingredients blended together transform the “vivande” and produce gastronomic results that retain the flavours, but not the shapes, of original components. Culinary creations herald new and unforeseeable gastronomic reconfigurations. Unlike other transformations, however, food transforms the transformed and from deterioration reproduces dishes that in their transient quality mirror the consumer’s impermanent nature, fixing, even wriggling it against the permanence of history. The constructive process that food exemplifies suggests at first glance a correspondence with the new role the Saracens play at Charles’ table. A rupture in this occurs, however, as the terse exchange between Rinaldo and King Balugante takes place. This reveals that despite the superficial display of kindness, deep-seated hostility is not appeased through hypocritical celebrations of religious feasts. The banquet displays Charles’ power and the influence he has over his guests, suggesting that Saracens, like “finissime vivande,” can be consumed, devoured, by French knights.

Ridiculed by the Saracens for the modesty of his clothes, Rinaldo conceals the resentment that gnaws him and savours the thought of revenge he believes will be his the next day at the joust. Balugante, however, detects his uneasiness and further humiliates Rinaldo by asking him whether the court honours him for his virtues or his possessions. Although the immediate goal is to deride the knight, Balugante’s question implicitly casts doubt on his hosts’ moral and ethical values. By raising the issue of appearance versus substance, hypocrisy versus sincerity, the pagan king unwittingly strips the veneer of hospitality the banquet seeks to sustain and exposes it as a banal ritual lacking the true spirit of the event it seeks to re-enact. The contempt in which the Christians hold the Saracens and their customs transpires in the manner in which they are described at the banquet. The verse that depicts them as “Saracini che non volsero usare banco né sponda,/ Anzi sterno a giacer come mastini/ Sopra a tapeti, come è loro

usanza,” (1, 13:4-6) scorns the Saracens’ custom of eating on rug-covered floors. Commensal hierarchy that places higher-ranking individuals at tables raised on platforms is rooted in court protocol governing the practices and observances of ceremonial banquets. By consuming the meal on the floor, as they customarily do, the Saracens implicitly relinquish the position of power that seating at the table would afford them and further the onlookers’ perception of their social and moral inferiority. But more than this, their custom dehumanizes them in the eyes of the Christians. The lower space the Saracens choose to occupy at the banquet makes it possible for the Christians to liken them to mastiffs, the aristocracy’s dogs of choice that usually lie below the tables waiting to eat scraps tossed to them. This image of men eating below the tables, in front of Charlemagne, constructs a social vertical scale of commensal hierarchy that again places Saracens at the bottom and the French at the top of it.

Rinaldo is not any more sympathetic toward the Saracens for he calls them “gente asinina, maledetta razza” (1, 16:6). His opinion is based on a construction of the “otherness” that excludes *a priori* the possibility of acceptance and inclusion because this would entail the acknowledgment and tolerance of cultural variables and, more importantly, the acceptance of the ambiguities and tensions that are inherent in human interactions among individuals from different belief systems. Rinaldo denigrates the Saracens for their lack of intelligence. His generalization is based solely on the affected construct of what he sees around him rather than on his direct experience. Still, more forcefully than Rinaldo’s, Charles’ remarks about his guests illustrate not just the cultural dichotomy between the two groups, but especially the contradictions undermining the meal’s true meaning. The assertion that the emperor “tutta la gente pagana disprezza, / Come arena del mar denanti a i venti” (1, 20:6-7), reveals the full measure of Charles’ disdain toward those he presumes inferior—in strength and knowledge—to him. As he retrieves the biblical image of sand blown by forceful wind, Charles inverts the meaning of the Psalm<sup>2</sup> where man’s vulnerability is counterbalanced by God’s compassion and discloses, instead, his misplaced sense of superiority toward men he perceives as weaker.

Predictably, Rinaldo does not take kindly to being publicly mortified. His retort to Balugante, however, shows him in control of his simmering resentment and even able to maintain an ostensibly unaffected behaviour

---

<sup>2</sup>“So the Lord has compassion on those who fear him...He remembers that we are dust...Man’s days are like those of grass...The wind sweeps over him and he is gone, and his place knows him no more,” Psalm 103, 13-16.

without submitting to impulsiveness. By explaining that Christians indulge gluttons at the tables, pamper whores in beds, and confer honour only according to courage, Rinaldo defines his cultural understanding of appearances and substance. According to this logic, gluttons who ravenously devour and who are at the same time devoured by the rapacity of their desires are appeased and subjugated by the French according to their want. Prostitutes, like gluttons, are enslaved by and succumb to the perversion of desires that makes them vulnerable preys in the hands of shrewd pursuers. Rinaldo's argument, pairing gluttons and prostitutes, hinges on the deep-rooted Christian belief that from Post-lapsarian times linked the seductiveness of eating to sexual seduction. But as it fuels tension by casting the Saracens as voracious destroyers of traditions and conventions, willing to prostitute moral and ethical standards for material gains, Rinaldo's powerful indictment unveils the hypocrisy saturating his (and the Christians') system of beliefs. While he argues that honour at his court is a measure of one's courage, his argument exposes deeper chords that resonate with his and his people's failure to understand that courage cannot be gauged by using flawed models. The conscious, careful, and single-minded depravity necessary to preying on gluttons and prostitutes' weaknesses discloses in fact the perpetrators' cowardice. By depicting his fellow knights as men skilled at gratifying the wants of individuals incapable of self-control in return for personal gains, Rinaldo ascribes to his faction the same deceitfulness and depravity for which he faults the Saracens. Accordingly, his rationale for honour fizzles out, leaving only the shell of his argument to prove the validity of the honour system that governs his camp. The emptiness of Rinaldo's argument reflects the ostentatious celebration of Pentecost. Reduced to a display of mere aesthetic significance the celebration of the Christian feast crumbles into a ritualization of forms that are disconnected from spiritual meaning. Christian beliefs paraded into spectacles of power to aggrandize Charles' power in the Saracens' eyes suggest only the prostitution of moral and ethical principles. The evisceration of the very principles on which the Christian camp supposedly bases its foundations necessarily entails the exclusion of honour. Rinaldo's scathing but flawed remark with regard to honour shows both his unawareness of the subtle implications his own argument presents and his failure to recognize the facts as they present themselves at the banquet.

Still, Balugante's insinuation juxtaposing wealth and courage indirectly exposes the moral inconsistencies cultivated by the sophisticated court culture. From this perspective the banquet's refined "vivande," transformed through intricate preparations of ingredients, is the symbolic correspon-

dent of a mode of conduct that favours appearance over substance. The banquet's encoded meanings reveal only hypocritical interactions between Christian and Saracens. And, as the space where commensal politics take place to seduce the enemy, render it harmless, and even temporarily turn it into an obliging ally, Charles's banquet is the literary counterpart to Riario's Roman feast. Like the historical one, rather than marking the partakers' moral and ethical integrity, this banquet denotes their unscrupulous practices. Or, to put it differently, under the veneer of conventional Judeo-Christian symbolism both banquets provide a view into the partakers' covetousness for power: power of possessions, power of wealth, and power to enforce particular perspectives. In short, they provide images of material (and carnal) desires that the partakers yearn to gratify.

The “finissime vivande” served at Charles' banquet do not reveal any specific content of the meal. Yet Boiardo's familiarity with the Este court and its customs, as well as the banquet's description, unequivocally suggests that Charles' meal hinges on the gastronomy of power. Still, it is surprising that the poet is not more precise because what may appear as a trifling non-issue becomes relevant when compared to the wider context of the *Innamorato*. In other cantos the poet is very specific about the food his characters consume. In Canto XXV, for example, Angelica welcomes Rinaldo's cousin Orlando to a meal that specifically includes “frutti e confetti di molta ragione” (1, 25: 46). During the meal she seduces and renders him harmless to the point that he becomes unable to achieve the goal that has set him on his journey: namely, possessing her. Angelica's confetti not only render Orlando powerless, but they also turn him into her pawn, a condition that can arguably be described as his becoming her food. Given the details Boiardo offers in other cantos, it stands to reason to believe that by not using the same accuracy in the crucial first canto the author gives “vivande” a broader meaning than food. And if one accepts the idea that despite their masterful preparations “vivande” are ultimately consumed, and destroyed by those who eat them, it is also possible to believe that they stand as a metaphor for human beings.

According to Louis Marin, through the process that transforms raw ingredients into prepared dishes, food becomes a sign encompassing elaborate ideological, political, and cultural concepts. He argues that it is through this metamorphosis that the comestible is transformed into the signified and the speakable is transformed into the edible (Marin, 125). Marin notes that in its resulting function of “transsignificance,” (Marin, 122) food becomes a metaphor, acquiring new meanings completely disassociated from its original physical significance. Marin's argument is espe-

cially relevant to Boiardo's lack of specificity for this first banquet and the way he cuts it short by interjecting Angelica's arrival into it. She disrupts the banquet and wrecks havoc among Christians and Saracens. Everyone's attention turns to her and she, with her tale, captivates all. Putting the food as well as their differences out of their minds, both Christians and Saracens inflamed by desire hunger for Angelica and long to have her, that is, to consume—eat—her. By seizing their attention and supplanting the “vivande,” she effectively becomes a “vivanda” each man believes can be appropriated for his individual pleasure. But just as the “vivande” turned powerful enemies into obliging guests, this new “vivanda,” Angelica, turns her foes into submissive subjects.

Charles himself is not impervious to the power she exerts and agrees, without much consideration, to the terms of her request. Although Angelica's true intentions are hidden from him at this time, his lack of concern with the accuracy of her story reveals, like his banquet, his fascination with form rather than substance. This appears most conspicuously in the verse that describes him as one who “Mira parlando e mirando favella.” The image of the aloof, focused leader is here countered with one that exposes a man mesmerized by, and vulnerable to, the attractiveness of his interlocutor. “Mirare,” which means both “to look” and “to admire,” sums up Charles' susceptibility to Angelica's beauty. But it is his “parlare” that turns into “favellare,” suggesting a shift from self-controlled to unguarded and even fantastic conversation, that more precisely sums up his capitulation to her. As the flaws of his character surface, Charles' role as the moral and political leader becomes questionable. He turns into Angelica's pawn and, as a result, the power he imperiously embodied and displayed through his banquet teeters on the brink of powerlessness and subjection. The scrumptious but unspecified “vivande,” the bait with which he temporarily disempowered the Saracens, finds its correspondent in Angelica (the Saracen) who renders the emperor Charles, like all the men around him, powerless. The scale of commensal hierarchy is here turned upside down by Angelica, a Saracen and a woman who embodies the unexpected and unspecified “vivanda” capable of thrusting the emperor and his knights into a position of passive power.

We know that by relying on the politics of food Riario succeeded in imposing his interests on his guests, essentially redesigning, if only for a brief period, the political map of early modern Italy. The Pazzi conspiracy that would expose the Riario / Della Rovere plotting was to backfire only in 1478. By this time Cardinal Riario was dead and Sisto's manoeuvrings had already entered a more complex stage. Yet Boiardo, the ambassador-

poet who attended Riario's historical banquet and had first-hand experience with gastronomic politics, does not afford the same success to his characters. Time and again he questions and undermines the legitimacy not just of their personal interests, but the means by which they seek to achieve them. He questions their obsession with rules and decorum and also their inability to confront embarrassing truths. In canto one Rinaldo and Charles, blind to what they perceive to be both irrelevant and extraneous to their moral superiority, do not question the principles on which they base their certainty. As a conduit for exposing the duplicity, ambiguity, and limits of power devoid of self-analysis food and banquet serve Boiardo formidably in the first Canto of the *Innamorato*. They show that despite the sense of aloofness and control their cultivated images seek to convey, powerful individuals who lack a clear sense of introspectiveness, like elaborate "vivande," conceal their true moral character under visual and ideological self-serving disguises. This, of course, raises a more intriguing question: is this Boiardo's critique of the Este's elite circle within which he worked? Or is it, again, just a matter of a persuasive woman appearing at the wrong time and making an offer that no reasonable man could possibly decline?

*Southern Connecticut State University*

#### *Cited Works*

- Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton UP, 1984. 2 vols.
- Boiardo, M. M. *Orlando Innamorato*. Ed. R. Bruscagli. Turin: Einaudi, 1995. 2 vols.
- Marin, Louis. *Food for Thought*. Trans. Mette Hjort. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.
- Messisbugo, Cristoforo. *Libro Novo: Nel qual s'insegna a far d'ogni sorte di vivanda secondo la diversità dei tempi, così di carne come di pesce. Et il modo d'ordinar banchetti, apparecchiare tavole, fornire palazzi, e ornar camere per ogni prencipe*. Venice: al segno di San Girolamo, 1556.
- Pastor, L. F. *The History of the Popes, from the Close of the Middle Ages*. Ed. F. I. Antrobus. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1949. 40 vols.
- Platina. *De honesta voluptate et valetudine*. Ed. and trans. M. E. Milham. Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998.
- Savonarola, Michele. *Libretto de tutte le cosse che se magnano: Un'opera dietetica del secolo XV*. Ed. Jane Nystedt. Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988.



THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT  
OR THE TASTE FOR SODOMY IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

LAURA GIANNETTI RUGGIERO

In medieval and Renaissance Italian literary texts, the immoderate desire for food (*la gola*) is often associated and sometimes equated with the desire for male-male sex, labelled “sodomy” at the time.<sup>1</sup> In medieval times the two sins, gluttony and lust and/or sodomy, were closely intertwined in the writings of the Fathers of the Church and unequivocally condemned by Saint Augustine in his *Confessions*, where they appear one after the other in the same discussion (S. Augustine, *Confessions*, book X, xxx-xxxii). Indeed, carnal pleasures for him include both lust, especially sodomy, and immoderate desire for food and drink. Even the pilgrim Dante—during his encounter with his friend Forese in *Purgatory*—supports this view in the condemnation of both the sin of gluttony, attributed to Forese Donati, and of licentious Florentine women who dared to show their breasts on the streets of Florence (*Purg.* 23:97-111).

Gluttony and lust in various forms—as the motive for comic play—are represented in Renaissance culture: in the *Decameron*, in some fifteenth-century short stories (*novelle*), in the mock-heroic poem *Morgante* by Luigi Pulci, and finally in the sixteenth-century burlesque poetry of Francesco Berni and his followers, the *Accademia dei Vignaiuoli*. In his *De Honesta Voluptate*, a collection of recipes and advice for good living, written in the

---

<sup>1</sup>With the term “sodomy” in this context I refer to male-male sex primarily as anal intercourse. The term is an umbrella that was used in Medieval and Renaissance periods to categorize all forms of homoerotic behaviour between men and between women, as well as anal and oral sex between men and women and/or sexual intercourse with animals. In sixteenth-century Italy to engage in male-male sodomy was not an exclusive practice; often it did not preclude sexual relations with women and was related to age (old-young) and a hierarchical (active-passive) structure. See Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, chap. VI, for fourteenth- and fifteenth-century prosecution of sodomy in Venice and the chapter “Marriage, Love, Sex and Renaissance Civic Morality” for the age/hierarchical structure. See also Giannetti and Ruggiero, “Introduction.” For Florence see Michel Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships* and the essay “Gender and Sexual Culture.” A valuable analysis of the homoerotic sexual environment in sixteenth-century Italy and Siena is in Ian Frederick Moulton, “Introduction.”

second half of fifteenth-century, the humanist Bartolomeo Sacchi known as Platina expresses what might be labelled a more balanced vision where moderation and wisdom take part in the “honest pleasure” of the flesh, in the enjoyment of food and sex (Platina, *On Right Pleasure and Good Health*, book I). In this work, Platina paid much attention to the idealistic principle of moderation derived from the Greek and Roman worlds.<sup>2</sup>

Still, for all the literary play and humanistic searching for a classical balance, the sinful tie of gluttony and lust did not disappear nor was it merely a literary *topos*: first, it was acknowledged by the Florentine communal statutes of 1322 that tellingly prohibit innkeepers from serving up culinary delights because they could attract men and boys and incite them to commit the unspeakable sin of sodomy (Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 159).<sup>3</sup> A century later, in his sermons, Bernardino da Siena similarly condemned good food and wine as fomenters of carnal lust and especially of sodomy. During Cosimo the Elder’s regime Florentine Archbishop Antonino Pierozzi (later St Antoninus)—in his confessor’s manual—warned against sloth, excess food and drink as causes of sodomy.<sup>4</sup> In the wake of several preachers’ admonitions, Florentine authorities at the end of the fifteenth-century began to regulate strictly the hours of operation for inns and taverns in order to avoid their becoming a meeting place for sodomites (Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 159). There seems to have been a widely shared vision at the time that saw the pleasures of eating and the pleasures of sex—particularly sodomy—as closely and dangerously related.

During the sixteenth-century, in the popular imagination of the various Lands of Cockaigne, the enjoyment of capons, partridges and roasted meats went hand in hand with the enjoyment of sex.<sup>5</sup> In Carnivalesque celebrations, where often the greasy pole (the tree of Cockaigne) was at the center stage, the sausage was the symbol of sexual and gustatory pleasure.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>See Montanari, *La fame e l’abbondanza*, for the distinction between the Roman ideal of moderation in food and the Celtic-Germanic ideal—later assumed by the Franks—of excess, (30-32).

<sup>3</sup>See also p. 305, n. 64 for the list of such foods: “tortelli, liverwort, spleen, roasted meats, ravioli, fish, meat in aspic, chicken or any kind of birth...”

<sup>4</sup>“imperochè come dice Idio per Ezechiele propheta, da ben mangiare e ben bere fu causata la ribalderia de Sodoma” Antonino di Firenze, *Opera*, fol. 65.

<sup>5</sup>Albalà, *Eating Right in the Renaissance*, 181. This seminal book has been crucial in the writing of this article.

<sup>6</sup>Starting with the painting “Land of Cockaigne” by Pieter Bruegel, the sausage was one of the most represented sexual symbols in European paintings from the sixteenth to the eighteenth-century.

In Pulci's *Morgante* the minor-giant Margutte extolled his three vices—gluttony, sodomy and the play of dice—as a perverse parody of cardinal virtues<sup>7</sup> In Italian Renaissance comedies—set in times of recurrent famines and wars – the theme of gluttony joined up with that of hunger and starvation. If servants died of hunger in Ruzante's comedies, in other texts the parasites were always on the lookout for sumptuous dinners and sodomitical pleasures.

In comedies, dialogues and especially poetry produced in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Italy the language started to register the idea that gluttony and sodomy were closely related to each other. The usage of the words *ghiotto* and *ghiottone* as a noun and as an adjective to indicate a sodomite is present in works—to quote a few—by Lorenzo de' Medici, Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi, Pietro Aretino, Anton Francesco Grazzini, Francesco Maria Molza, Francesco Berni and others.<sup>8</sup> To focus on comedy, the word *ghiottone* (glutton) or simply *ghiotto* (gluttonous) was used to refer stereotypically to male characters portrayed as sodomites; a stereotype also often associated with pedants, parasites and young servants.<sup>9</sup> Particularly interesting is the use Pietro Aretino made of these terms in his comedy *Il Marescalco*. There the pedant, with his typical learned ignorance and foolish use of Latin, is portrayed as the stereotypical sodomite who has a difficult relationship with a page who makes continuous fun of him. The language used by the pedant to insult the young page—probably his one-time

---

<sup>7</sup>See Garrido, “Le thème de la grande bouffé,” and Palma, “Of Courtesans, Knights,” 40.

<sup>8</sup>Jean Toscan shows with several examples how widespread the usage was. See paragraph 237 “Le gourmand” 1: 410-412, and quotations listed in the Glossary under the voice *ghiotto*. Matteo Bandello (1485-1561) narrates a tale on “Porcellio romano” (presumably Nicolò Porcellio, humanist, historian and poet who lived in the fifteenth-century at the court of Francesco Sforza in Milan) using food metaphors to talk about Porcellio's notorious passions of the flesh. According to Bandello, Porcellio loved “la carne del capretto molto più che altro cibo” and, at the moment of his final confession, justified his vice as the most natural thing: “ Oh, oh, padre reverendo, voi non mi sapeste interrogare. Il trastullarmi con i fanciulli a me è più naturale che non è il mangiar e il ber a l'uomo, e voi mi domandavate se io peccava contro natura. Andate, andate, messere, ché voi non sapete che cosa sia un *buon boccone*.” (emphasis mine) Bandello, *Novelle*, 149 and 155.

<sup>9</sup>For instance, see the usage of this word and its variations in the comedy *Il ragazzo* by the Venetian writer Lodovico Dolce: II.1 p. 226 “Ah ghiotto, ribaldello”; II.3, p. 234 “ghiottarella”; IV.1, p. 266 : “Ghiotto.”

sexual partner—includes the word *ghiotto* and its revealing variation of *ghioticculo* (or glutton-ass).<sup>10</sup> The last word is used frequently in the comedy as an insult to indicate someone eager to be sodomized. The more general term *ghiotto* recurs in its homoerotic associations in other texts such as dialogues and in contemporary burlesque poetry. The term *ghiotto* also appears at times in Florentine criminal records and is especially common in the depositions given by informers to the Ufficiali di Notte, the magistracy dedicated to the suppression of sodomy; the primary word used to refer to the young boys who prostituted themselves was *ghiotti* along with some other derogatory feminine names (Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 107 and 288 n. 100). The extensive usage of the terms *ghiotto* and *ghiottone* in literary texts, in the judiciary system and in the everyday world takes part in and contributes to a set of cultural assumptions that view homoerotic practices as an immoderate desire in many ways equated to the immoderate desire for food. Jean Toscan offers a more precise genealogy for this usage of the word:

If these particular erotic practices or the part of the body where such practices take place may be called *bocconi*, it is normal to call *ghiotto* or *ghiottone* those who seek them. (Toscan, *Le Carnaval du langage*, 1: 411; my translation).

The negative conceptual link between gluttony and lust was not limited to law, literature, and everyday language; it also found support in the medical-dietetic genre that captured widespread interest from the mid-fifteenth-century on. Written mainly by physicians—although philosophers, poets and artists were also interested in laying out their own particular view of the ideal dietary regime and nutritional choices—these works were above all prescriptive and their general theoretical framework was Galenic. Even though it is clear that most of this prescriptive literature was not adopted in everyday practice, it is important to recognize that the dietary literature of the Renaissance—like prescriptive literature in general—should be regarded as an embodiment of a range of cultural ideals.<sup>11</sup>

Among the dominant dietetic theories of the early Renaissance, the concept of transference was especially important: it held that a peculiar quality of an animal or of its organs would be transferred to the person who ate it or them. For instance, if one ate a wolf's liver, associated with

---

<sup>10</sup> See *Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance*. 166, n. 139

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion on food in literary texts of the Renaissance and the medical-dietetic literature, see Palma, "Of Courtesans, Knights."

courage, one would become courageous; if one ate bull's testicles, one would recover his lost virility (Albala, *Eating Right*, 79-80 and 169). According to Platina, the consumption of pork, the meat of an omnivorous and greedy animal, would lead to the transformation of one into a ravenous *ghiottone* unable to distinguish between good and bad food.<sup>12</sup> Other authors recommended not eating goat—a “notoriously” lascivious animal—so as to maintain chastity (Albala, *Eating Right*, 80 and 149-50). Other texts, however—based on the same theory—suggested which food ought to be consumed for help with Venus's work; this “aphrodisiac” literature became a very successful genre in itself. (Albala, *Eating Right*, 146-50 and 168). For instance, all foods that were seen as warming the body and the blood, from asparagus to artichokes, from cloves to pigeons and partridges, as well as all salty foods were considered aphrodisiacs (Albala, *Eating Right*, 147-8). Sometimes physicians also associated rare and expensive foods coming from far regions with illicit sex and “often explicitly connected perverse tastes in food with sexual license.” (Albala, *Eating Right*, 150). The transference theory would lose force by the second half of the sixteenth century, but it remained common to attribute somatic effects and symbolic meanings to different types of foods.

Social symbolism was important as well: in the eyes of these dietetic writers, certain foods were appropriate only for certain classes. Peasants should eat rustic grains and preserved meat, while birds, fresh meats, fruit or seafood were suitable only for gentlemen and courtiers. As has been widely discussed, food was a significant factor in social evaluation and this was especially true in Italy during the Renaissance—with a strong social hierarchy and great differences between urban and rural cultures (Grieco, “Food and Social Classes”). Such distinctions were closely related to the desire by the upper classes to distinguish themselves through specific manners and behaviour and to a hierarchical vision of the world that saw it as one “great chain of being” that progressed upwards from the humblest of things to the most important. According to this conception as applied to food, plants and animals occupy a place on a hierarchical ladder—ordered according to the four elements—that has on the top mythological animals living in the highest element, fire (such as the phoenix), and at its base the

---

<sup>12</sup> Albala, *Eating Right*, 168. In the original Latin: “Hoc animal edacissimum est, et ob hanc rem sanguine multum ac calore abundat. Uligiosa loca, ubi voluteatur libenter, incolit ad reprimendum calorem. [...] Colliguntur item multa ad pulmentaria ex porco nuper caeso, ut adeps caro suilla tam recens quam salita; etsi gustum titillat, perniciosa tamen omnino est ac mali succi, ut ait Celsus.” Platina, *On Right Pleasure*, Book ii, 162.

humblest plants that grow directly in the soil (such as onions and garlic) (Grieco, “Food and Social Classes,” 307-12). The great chain of being was thought to connect all God’s creation in one design. Roots and legumes, being products of the soil, were the farthest from God and thus the only ones that peasants at the bottom of society could eat. Because fruit trees were closer to the sky with their branches, and so distanced themselves from the soil, the lowest of the four elements, fruit could be a food worthy of nobles.<sup>13</sup> An interesting literary transposition of these assumptions can be read in a fifteenth-century short story by Sabadino degli Arienti. Unable to resist the succulent peaches that grow in the garden of his master, the peasant Zuco Padella is caught in the act of stealing them to satisfy his desire. After punishing him harshly, his master haughtily underlines the servant’s deeper crime warning him: “The next time stay away from the fruit of my peers and stick with yours: turnips, garlic, leeks, onions, and shallots along with sorghum bread.”<sup>14</sup>

If peaches are exalted in this novella as a delicious and refined fruit, fit for a king, several physicians who wrote about dietetics in the sixteenth century condemned them harshly along with melons and strawberries. Following the concept of the “great chain of being”, it is clear that melons and strawberries were condemned at least in part because they grow directly on the soil, but the low opinion of peaches does not seem to fit. Curiously, while fruit in general was viewed as the noblest among the foods produced by plants, peaches themselves were often considered poisonous.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Michele Savonarola confirms this view reminding his Lord “la utilità e malicia del nutrimento de le cosse che nascano in terra.” *Libreto de tute le cosse che se manzano*, I: 62-3.

<sup>14</sup> “Un’altra volta lassa stare le fructe de li mei pari e mangia delle tue che sono le rape, gli agli, porri, cipolle e le scalogne col pan di sorgo.” The novella is quoted in Montanari, *La fame e l’abbondanza*, 108-109. For a modern critical edition see *Le Porretane* ed. by Bruno Basile.

<sup>15</sup> Both Platina and Savonarola report the very similar legend about peaches as poisoned fruit. “Persica tota Asia nascuntur maxime vero in Perside unde ad nos translata nome habent. Sero id quidem factum et cum difficultate, verum postea ubique fere sponte proveniunt. Fabulas mihi narrare videntur qui scribunt venenata cum cruciatu apud Persas gigni, et ob eam rem a Cyro inde ad Aegyptios translata, ut quos armis vincere non poterat, veneno saltem necaret. Configunt item quo res verosimilior videatur Aegyptio sole et caelo deinde mitigata fuisse.” Platina, *On Right Pleasure*, book II, 148. “Ma prima voglio tua Signoria sapia che'l persico in Persia era arbor venenosa, dapo' fu traslatata in Egypto e fata fue non venenosa, di che comprehenda tua Signoria.” Savonarola, *Libreto de tute le cosse*, 62.

In many of these texts, peaches are included among aphrodisiac foods more fit for glutinous courtiers, such as eels, oysters, salmon, asparagus and artichokes (Albala, *Eating Right*, 206). Melons shared this unhappy company and enjoyed a yet more negative fame in widely circulated folk tales that warned that even kings and popes had passed away after eating pantagruelic dinners based on melons.<sup>16</sup> In fact, in the works of physicians and dieticians, virtually nothing was considered more dangerous for one's health than eating peaches and melons because of their ability to putrefy in the stomach and thus create venomous humours. Only the most courageous doctors were willing to allow their charges to eat peaches or melons—if one could not resist the temptation—but then only at the beginning of the meal so as to have a chance to avoid the putrefaction problem. The condemnation of melons was so widespread that a physician from Bologna, Pietro Nati, felt the need to defend the fruit in a small treatise he wrote about the more general topic of health during times of plague. Nati observed that melons were no longer poisonous—as they were in Galen's time—and that they were regularly consumed at courtier's tables.

Nati's study is interesting because it shows how practice and dietary precepts did not always coincide: melons, peaches, and other types of fruit were, in fact, enjoyed during meals and receptions offered at gentlemen's houses.<sup>17</sup> Yet, for others, like the Venetian nobleman Luigi Cornaro, the medical taboo was apparently followed. After having been ill as a young man, he decided to test for himself if foods that tasted good were equally

---

<sup>16</sup>Savonarola, *Libreto de tute le cosse*, 75-76. The same prescription against melons is repeated in different treatises from Platina to the much later Lodovico Bertaldi: "I meloni, quando sono maturi a sufficienza e che hanno tutte le qualità, che gli convengono, sono tanto dessiderati da molti Prencipi, e altri Signori grandi, che molti sono morti, per il superfluo uso d'essi, come riferisce il Durando [ i.e. Castor Durante] ch'Albino imperatore tanto avido di mangiarne, come ancor delle persiche, che in una sera mangiò dieci meloni d'Ostia e cento persiche. Paulo Secondo Pontefice, morì d'apoplesia, havendo nella cena mangiato due gran meloni. Dicono Federico terzo, Henrico settimo e Alberto secondo imperatorii esser morti per l'uso d'essi." *Regole della sanità e natura décibi di Ugo Benzo Senese*, fol. 422.

<sup>17</sup>"Oltre a questo narrando essi le proprietà loro, li biasimano come nocivi al corpo et allo stomacho, perciò diceva Galeno che e sono freddi, umidi, facilmente corutibili, e che mangiadone dispongono lo stomacho al vomito, le quali cose nel vero non si possono già dire de Poponi nostri, conciosia che per esperienza si vegga, mangiarsene nelle tavole de gentil'huomini in gran quantità e continuare le settimane e i mesi interi senza passare mai un giorno che e' non ne mangino. "Breve discorso intorno alla natura del popone," 2.

good for his health, as was often claimed in popular lore. Through practice he was convinced that the popular lore was false and the medical taboo right: he decided that he liked fruit and cold wine but that they, despite their pleasant taste, were not at all good for his health:

While doing this [test] I found out that that claim was false, because I liked very much rough and very cold wine as well as melons and other fruit...<sup>18</sup>

Still if Luigi Cornaro's experiments confirmed his decision to live a restrained life renouncing peaches and melons, those succulent fruits attracted many others and drew attention to themselves from the frontispieces of many sumptuous cookbooks—such as that by Christopharo da Messisbugo—where courtiers are shown in the act of offering them to their princes (Albala, *Eating Right*, 13). In Messisbugo's book there is no mention of any physician's negative advice; melons and peaches appear at different moments during banquets, often together with other types of food deemed dangerous.<sup>19</sup> As Jean Louis Flandrin has demonstrated, around the end of the sixteenth-century dietetics and cookbooks took different paths: it was the beginning of the so-called “liberation of the gourmet” and the enjoyment of good cooking (Flandrin, “From Dietetics to Gastronomy”) This separation, however, progressed slowly and texts that moralistically rejected certain foods not only because they were bad for the health but also because they were identified with the corrupt habits of the court continued to proliferate.<sup>20</sup>

Medical-dietetic literature of the sixteenth-century was closely attuned to and contributed to the process that, in Norbert Elias's vision, has been labelled the “civilization of taste.” (Albala, *Eating Right*, 217-218). As

---

<sup>18</sup>“Però mi posi diligentissimamente à voler conoscere i cibi, che fossero a mio proposito, e prima deliberai di farne sperienza, se quelli che al gusto piacevano, mi giovassero, ò pur mi fossero di nocimento, per conoscere se quel proverbio, che io havea già tenuto per vero, e che verissimo universalmente si crede che sia, anzi è il fondamento di tutti i sensuali, che seguono i loro appetiti, era in fatto vero, che dice che quello che sa buono, notrisce e giova. Il che facendo ritrovai che era falso, perchè a me il vin brusco e freddissimo sapea bono, e così i meloni e gl'altri frutti.” *De la vita sobria*, c. 8.

<sup>19</sup>Messisbugo, “Banchetti, composizioni di vivande et apparecchio generale.”

<sup>20</sup>See for instance the works by the Calvinist expatriate Guglielmo Grataroli where courts are chastised as the place where sloth, gluttony and perverse taste rule. Albala, *Eating Right*, 26.

noted, the diffusion of books on dietetics where the prevalent attitude was moralistic was relatively recent in that century. In works written earlier only a few foods were openly condemned; restrictions hinged on moderation. The natural attraction for certain foods and their good taste were seen as guiding principles. With its pleasant taste, fruit in moderation could even be seen as therapeutic in this context. One possible explanation for the changing attitude of sixteenth-century writers with respect to melons, peaches and other fruits is that conceptions of body, pleasure, and food changed along the lines suggested by Elias. Foods that had qualities that were similar to humours deemed positive were nutritious and foods that were different were restricted to correcting humoral imbalances. For sixteenth-century authors, however, there is a shift to repression of instincts as a key factor in dietary decisions—hunger and good taste are no longer a positive signs of the body's humoral or other needs, but rather potential temptations in a moral battle waged over controlling the desires of the body and its appetites. One should eat what is good for health, not what tastes good, as Cornaro already affirmed. Food could be used as a medicine to correct imbalances, but this was no longer to be controlled by desire and taste but by doctors and experts in health both physical and spiritual. Certain foods, delicious and now tempting, could now lead inevitably to physical and mental illnesses, sexual perversion, even death. Along with fruit this list of suspect foods included all those that like sweets, fat meats or sausages were portrayed in carnivalesque representations where they symbolized gustatory and sexual license and lower-class tastes (Albala, *Eating Right*, 180-181). It is important to remember, however, that these foods were regularly served during upper class banquets, appeared in cookbooks, and were consumed by people in their everyday meals.

British travelers in Italy often remarked on the richness and abundance of Italian fruit at meals even as they referred to the dangers of eating too much fruit. William Cecil received from his son's tutor, before his leaving for Italy, the following warning:

It is to be feared that Mr. Thomas shall not bear the great heats of that country, and being given also to eat much fruit, may soon fall into sickness, as he did in France by that occasion (Olsen, "Poisoned Figs," 236)

William Thomas, one of the first English historians of Italy, actually admitted to having been converted to eating fruit after living in Italy, renouncing the heavy meat-based diet of his native country (Olsen, "Poisoned Figs," 240). Melons also particularly attracted him, but he warned his readers to abstain from eating them during the summer when

they were ripe and full of juice. He even observed ambiguously that their sweetness is so attractive that no one can resist it and some even eat so many that they die as a result (Olsen, "Poisoned Figs," 247) Did William Thomas know the medical proscriptions? His words and those of other British travelers in sixteenth-century Italy stress the conflict between the prohibition of such "dangerous" foods and the everyday experience of living and eating in Italy.

Practice and theory seem to diverge profoundly, then, in this period. The insistence on prohibition and the on-going attempt to build a dietetic ideal must be seen as being as significant in many ways as its rejection in everyday life. It has been hypothesized that the stronger the prohibition of these foods was at the time—as strange food, as food fit only for courtiers, as dangerous and illicit food—the stronger became the desire to break the taboo. Peaches and melons came originally from Persia and from the Middle East, lands of fabled beauty, abundance and corrupt customs, lands often associated in popular belief with sodomy; thus their fruits could be seen as a sort of suspicious food right from their origins.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the taboo against these fruits grew in close conjunction with a growing market for such food, the fashion of having fruit trees and gardens in Renaissance villas and a general higher level of consumption.<sup>22</sup>

\* \* \*

Literature, however, might suggest a deeper and more compelling reason yet for aversion to these fruits in the Renaissance and also help to explain the strange disjunction between practice and theory. For while dietetic literature saw a great enemy in forbidden fruits, especially melons and peaches, contemporary literature used those and other food images to represent and celebrate the forbidden fruits of Renaissance sexuality, illicit sex and

---

<sup>21</sup> Rosenberger, "Arab Cuisine and Its Contributions to European Culture": "Arab princes ordered fruit brought to Baghdad from afar: melons packed in ice and shipped in lead containers, along with prized Damascus grapes and plums. The Middle East was apparently the original home of a number of species known to the Greeks and Romans. The Arabs played the important role of improving these species and making them known over a wide area. These include the apricot [...] and the peach, which was soon acclimatized in Iran. What information we have about the diffusion of citrus fruit is unreliable. The melon known since antiquity, was joined by the watermelon, which came from India. Both were widely cultivated as sweet, refreshing treats." 219.

<sup>22</sup> Flandrin, "Introduction: The Early Modern Period."

especially sodomy. The so-called paradoxical *encomium* was the preferred poetic form used by Francesco Berni and his followers. In it, the praise of an everyday simple object, food, or even an unpleasant illness—such as syphilis—wittily played with and drew upon erotic or obscene metaphors.<sup>23</sup> The erotic poetry of Francesco Berni, Giovanni Mauro, Anton Francesco Grazzini, Agnolo Firenzuola, Giovanni Della Casa, Annibal Caro, and a much wider circle of their followers, the *Accademia dei Vignaiuoli*, delighted especially in playing with the interchangeability of those forbidden fruits and the bodily parts they represented and then in the way this metaphorical interchangeability could be used to describe the pleasures of sodomy.

The *Accademia dei Vignaiuoli* originated in 1532 from a group of humanists and poets earlier gathered in the Accademia Romana that was first founded by Pomponio Leto in the fifteenth-century.<sup>24</sup> Francesco Berni and the poets that took part in the *Accademia dei Vignaiuoli*, from Agnolo Firenzuola to Giovanni Della Casa and Annibal Caro—to cite only the most noted—were all accomplished humanists who knew Latin and the classics and who wrote classical poems, comedies, and *novelle* in imitation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. An invitation to a ludic style of life that will be attached to the *Accademia dei Vignaiuoli* is anticipated in a letter written by Francesco Berni to Francesco Bini in 1529:

We must live until we die, despite those who don't like it, but the important thing is to live happily, as I invite you to do, by attending those banquets which are taking place in Rome, and by writing as little as you can; because this is the victory, which conquers the world (Frantz, *Festum Voluptatis*, 26).<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>On sixteenth-century Italian erotic poetry see: Marzo, *Studi sulla poesia erotica del Cinquecento* and Longhi, *Lusus. Il capitolo burlesco nel Cinquecento*, especially chapter II: "La cucina di Parnaso." On Francesco Berni and his works see Francesco Berni, ed. Nigro.

<sup>24</sup>On the Accademia de' Vignaiuoli see: Frantz, *Festum Voluptatis*, 24-35, Marzo, *Studi sulla poesia erotica*, 13-23, *Renaissance Humanism*, [ed. by Anne Reynolds] 17, 52-53 and the chapter "Roma 1532-1537: Accademia per burla" pp. 51-64 in Romei, *Berni e Berneschi*.

<sup>25</sup>"A vivere havemo fino alla morte a dispetto di chi non vuole: e 'l vantaggio è vivere allegramente, come conforto a far voi: attendendo a frequentar quelli banchetti, che si fanno per Roma, e scrivendo sopra tutto manco che potete. Quia haec est victoria, quae vincit mundum." Francesco Berni a M.Gio. Francesco Bini, *Lettere facete e piacevoli di diversi grandi uomini e chiari ingegni*, vii, 36-37.

Another letter—mocking classical letters of dedication—written by Berni to Francesco Bini in 1534, could be read as the perfect poetic *manifesto* of the group; in it Berni salutes all his friends and wishes that they enjoy in many senses their gardens and a good harvest:

and above all the others to the very good natured Mr. Molza, to Mr. Giovanni Della Casa, and to all the Divine Academy. May God grant you his blessing in giving you a large Priapus for your garden, with a pitchfork as long as a beam between your legs and a big scythe in your hand and that you will be bothered neither by frost, fog, worms or foul winds, and that you might have beans and peas in their pods and peaches and carrots all year round, as I desire for my own small and failing garden here which I take care of and keep up as much as I can.<sup>26</sup>

It appears that the poets of Berni's circle amused themselves in banquets both poetic and real, both culinary and sexual, in which we may presume, peaches and melons were consumed despite medical warnings and legal proscriptions.

In their poems dedicated to the forbidden fruits there also appears to be a conscious playing with the pedantic side of their own avocations as humanists. On the one hand Berni and his followers could not resist the classical touch, the reference to ancient Roman or Greek literature that showed their learning and wit; but, in a way similar to what we find in the “erudite” comedy tradition based on classical models, humanist writers could at the same time mock the comic side of the would-be humanist/pedant who could not say anything without basing it on a classical text and because of this, often spouted much that was laughable nonsense to the common sense of the day. Much like such pedants in Renaissance comedies, the fifteenth and sixteenth-century corpus of medical-dietetic literature was also heavily based on ancient *auctoritas*, especially Galen and Hippocrates, authors whose opinions, no matter how contrary to contemporary practice or simple everyday understanding, were

---

<sup>26</sup>“e sopra gli altri al da benissimo Signor Molza, a M. Giovanni della Casa, e a tutta quella divina Academia. Così vi dia Dio grazia di avere un priapone grande per il vostro orto, con una fuscina trabale fra gambe e una falciazza in mano: e che non vi s'accosti mai ne brinata, ne nebbia, ne bruchi, ne vento pestilente: e habbiate fave e bacelli, e pesche e carote tutto l'anno: si come desidero d' havere io nel mio horticciuolo fallito qua giu, che attendo pure a raffazzonarlo quanto posso...” *Lettere facete*, xii, 46-48. I have slightly modified the translation by Frantz. A Priapus was a phallic boundary marker used in ancient Rome to demarcate and protect property.

tirelessly repeated by one Renaissance author after the other. Making fun of such humanistic texts condemning fruits such as peaches and melons which were sternly warned against in this classical tradition, then, offered another opportunity to mock playfully some of the more extreme characteristics of their own humanist pretensions and at the same time cleverly extol sodomy – both were, in a witty way that was irresistible to Berni and his fellow word-smiths, formally forbidden fruits which, in the everyday world, were enjoyed by those in the know. The law and the Church condemned sodomy, represented here by peaches and melons, while peaches and melons in their own right were forbidden by the classical dietetic and medical texts reiterated by humanist authors. What better way for the *berneschi* poets to playfully extol sodomy—the forbidden sin of the Renaissance—than to praise peaches and melons, the forbidden fruits of the Renaissance?

\* \* \*

Francesco Berni soon became the most important member of the *Accademia de' Vignaiuoli* and his leadership was recognized by the other poets, as is clear in the beginning lines of Francesco Maria Molza *Capitolo de' fichi*:

“Di lodare il mellone avea pensato  
quando Febo sorrise e Non fia vero  
che 'l fico disse resti abbandonato.  
Però, se di seguir brami il sentiero,  
che 'l Bernia corse col cantar suo pria,  
drizzar qui vi lo 'ingegno or fia mestiero.”<sup>27</sup>

I thought to praise the melon, / when Febus smiled and said: / “It should not be the case that the fig will be neglected” / However, if you wish to follow the path / That Berni ran up with his early poetry / It is necessary to stiffen your wit here and now. (my translation)

In the following years, several authors followed the path laid out by Berni and contemporary editors produced numerous collections of this pun-full erotic poetry, a regular *ghiottoneria* of fruit, sex and sodomy.<sup>28</sup> To understand this literature it is helpful to search for “euphemistic substitu-

---

<sup>27</sup>Molza, “Capitolo de' Fichi”, vv. 1-6, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup>For a list of the most important sixteenth-century collections of erotic and burlesque poems, see Marzo, *Studi sulla poesia erotica*, 7 n. 2.

tions”—as Jean Toscan did in his pioneering and exhaustive study of Italian Renaissance erotic language—but also crucially to put this literature in its cultural and historical context. The fascination with descriptions of fruit in erotic poetry certainly warrants a closer examination for its rich nuances. For the extensive use of images of forbidden fruits in erotic poetry was not an accident; it is clear that Berni and his followers and imitators were well aware of dietetic proscriptions that labelled certain types of fruit dangerous for one’s health and at the same time extremely desirable. In a neat parallel, the same was true for sodomy: it was desired, forbidden, and frequently practiced.

Berni’s famous *Capitolo delle pèsche*, written in 1522, turns on one of the more popular uses of peaches in this genre, the metaphor based on the similar shape and look of a peach and a youth’s bottom. In other poems the rounded shape of melons or apples were used in the same way.<sup>29</sup> The *Capitolo delle pèsche* rejected completely the contemporary medical opinions that held that peaches corrupted the stomach.<sup>30</sup>

Son le pèsche apritive e cordiali,  
saporite, gentil, restorative,  
come le cose c’ hanno gli speziali.” (Berni, *Rime*, p. 50, vv. 43-45)

Peaches are aperitifs and cordials [in the original sense of drinks that aide the stomach in eating and digesting] / Tasty, delicate and restorative / Just like the products of the apothecary. (my translation)

---

<sup>29</sup> See for instance the “Capitolo di Andrea Lori in lode delle mele.” Interestingly in this poem sodomy is understood as male-male at first but also as male-female sexual practice and the medical authorities of the past are called into question: “[...] Ma ‘l tempo, ch’ogni cosa al suo fin traggie/ Ha mostro al mondo il valor delle mele,/ Ond ogn’huomo poi n’ha posto per le piaggie./ le donne al primo steron su'l crudele,/ Dicendo lor pastocchie sopra il Fico;/ Poi ancor esse han calato le vele/ E si son risolute a qualche amico,/ De le mele, ch’elle han dietro al lor frutto, / Dar, per non fare il loro giardin mendico./ Onde si scorge hoggi il melo per tutto/ Usarsi, e fino a certi trasandati,/ Che vanno spesso in barca per l’asciutto./ Leggi in Galeno, in Hippocrate, e in tanti/ Altri, che fur dottor di medecina,/ Perchè di questo io non vo dir più innanzi.”

<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note that Berni actually quotes the triad of medical *auctoritas* of the past saying that “Dioscoride, Plinio e Teofrasto/ non hanno scritto delle pèsche bene/ perché non ne facevano troppo guasto.” “X. Capitolo delle pèsche (avanti l’agosto 1522),” pp. 49-51 in Berni, *Rime*. This excellent edition by Danilo Romei explains all the erotic metaphors in the poems.

If the learned literature recommended eating peaches before the meal as noted earlier,<sup>31</sup> Berni humorously recommends enjoying them all the time, but especially after dinner. The sexual metaphor is clear:

O frutto sopra gli altri benedetto,  
buono inanzi, nel mezzo e dietro pasto;  
ma inanzi buono e di dietro perfetto!" (Berni, *Rime*, p. 49, vv. 10-12)

Oh fruit most blessed / Good before the meal, in the middle and behind / But especially good in front and perfect from behind! (my translation)

Dietary theories are used by the *berneschi* poets as a perfect pretext to insist on the healthy quality of fruit – and sodomy – as in the following verses by Ercole Bentivoglio:

Le frutte dal formaggio accompagnate  
son men nocive, anzi salubri e buone  
al gusto e a lo stomaco più grata:  
massime i fichi e le pere e'l melon  
et le pèsche, che si piaccion a i preti  
che le soglion usar d' ogni stagione.<sup>32</sup>

Fruit that comes with cheese / Is not bad, actually it is healthy and good / Quite pleasing to the stomach and to the taste / Especially figs, pears and melons / And peaches which priests most love / And normally use in every season. (my translation)

Melons also had their advocates: the poet Anton Francesco Grazzini praised their virtues as leading one on to the good path of sodomy:

O popon degno d' ogni monarchia  
io mi ti volto con divote ciglia,  
acciò mi scorga per la buona via.<sup>33</sup>

Melon worthy of every kingdom / I look upon you with devotion / So that I'll find the good path. (my translation)

---

<sup>31</sup>For instance see Michele Savonarola's advice regarding melons: "Voleno esser manzati in anti pasto, il perchè manzati dopo pasto fano il cibo del stomaco lubricare. Generano vento e cuossì fanno venire la colica," Savonarola, *Libreto de tute le cosse*, 75. Savonarola's opinion, that melons should be eaten before the meal, is repeated several times by various sixteenth and seventeenth-century authors, for instance Bertaldo, *Regole della sanità e natura de' cibi di Ugo Benzo Senese*.

<sup>32</sup>See "Del Formaggio al lettore buon compagno."

<sup>33</sup>Quoted in Toscan, *Le Carnaval du langage*, 1:511.

The poet Antonio Mario Negrisoli happily declared that “the melon excites all desires,” nourishes the stomach, refreshes the liver, and is Ganymede’s favourite food.<sup>34</sup>

The metaphoric use of peaches and melons can be found early in Italian literature, especially in the *canti carnascialeschi*. In particular, Lorenzo de’ Medici in his “Canzona degli innestatori,”—a poem dedicated to the act of grafting plants, including peaches—plays with lengthily descriptions of different types of sexual contact between males as well as between males and females.<sup>35</sup> The anonymous “Canzona delle pèsche” while recognizing that most people prefer to use peaches after the meal (“l’usa dreto”) concludes with a general exhortation to enjoy peaches at any time:

Alcun l’usa al pasto avanti,  
ma di noi innanzi e ’ndreto;  
quel sol piace agl’ignoranti,  
la più parte l’usa dreto:  
ognun l’usi e stiesi cheto,  
'nanzi o dreto o dove vuole.<sup>36</sup>

Some enjoy it [the peach] before the meal / But we like it before and after; / Rude people only enjoy it before / Most use it after / Just let everybody use it and keep quiet / Before or after or wherever they prefer. (my translation)

The group of poems written by Berni and the *Vignaiuoli* that extol the virtues of peaches and melons are clearly associated with the idea of sodomy in the sense of male-male sexual practice, but this fact does not demonstrate that male sodomy was seen by them as an exclusive sexual practice or category *per se* in the modern sense. Other poems—in the same group—exalt

<sup>34</sup>“Così 'l Poppone ogn'altra voglia invesca./ Non si trova huom sì vil fra l'altre genti,/ ch'avendone uno, e la bacchetta in mano, / non si stimì uno Augusto incontinenti. [...] Ma avertite Signor, ch'io solo intendo / de bianchi e sodi, e ch'han fra poche frondi/ fermo rampollo, al resto io non attendo./ E meno ai spalancati, e a i mal rotondi,/ che son di largo humor, ch'entro lor serra/ la stagion mia, e d'odor tristo fecondi./ Con gran virtù il Poppone ogn'huom afferra/ lo stomaco nudrisse, e lo conforta,/ e il fegato rinfresca, e 'l ventre sferra./ Alterando il boccon sempre la scorta/ d'un bicchiere di buon vino ei se ne chiede,/ e di due spesso a chi ha la mente accorta [...] Più di questo alcun cibo già non piace/ l'affermò Ganimede, e'l vero è questo/ nettar, ch'ad ogni gusto si conface/ come gloria e honor di tutto il resto.” Negrisoli Ferrarese, “Capitolo delle laudi del Poppone al Signor Giuseppe Malatesta.”

<sup>35</sup>See v. 46: “puossi ogni pianta, e pèsche anche innestare.” De’Medici, “IV. Canzona degli innestatori,” in *Trionfi e canti carnascialeschi*.

<sup>36</sup>“XLIV. Canzona delle pèsche” in *Trionfi e canti carnascialeschi*, vv-15-20.

sex with women speaking in the praise of the figs or simply laud the phallus, represented with different images of fruit or vegetables. The poems on peaches and melons nonetheless capture the readers' attention for the privileged place given to the passive side of sodomy, usually considered the least honourable, because of its association with the female sex.

In sixteenth-century Italy sodomy was held to be a mortal sin and a crime against nature, God, and society and as such was regularly deemed worthy of capital punishment. Nonetheless, it was widely practiced and ideally organized in a patriarchal and hierarchical fashion that mirrored the rest of society. In theory as well as in everyday reality, young adult males were supposed to take the dominant active role, sexually and socially – they sought out the peaches and melons – while younger youths in their early teens took the passive role – offering peaches and melons. In literature the same model was regularly presented even as it was often mocked in the humanistic student-teacher/pedant relationships in Renaissance comedies. It is interesting to note, however, that even this passive-active hierarchy is turned on its head by the irreverent Berni when he concludes his poem on peaches by arguing that, “the most fortunate is he/ who can give or take peaches.”<sup>37</sup> Is this merely a playful reversal or a suggestive indication that the active/passive age hierarchy that was clearly the ideal for Renaissance male/male sexual relations was more flexible than it appears and that some males both desired peaches and offered them, perhaps Berni himself?<sup>38</sup>

If it is true that sexuality is a “discourse”—in a Foucauldian sense—that

---

37 “Io ho sempre avuto fantasia,/ per quanto possi un indovino apporre,/ che sopra gli altri avventurato sia/ colui che può le pèsche dare e tòrre.” “Capitolo delle pèsche,” vv.73-76.

38 “in fact his poem was so taken as an expression of his true preference sexually that he was charged by his enemies with being a sodomite.” Frantz, *Festum Voluptatis*, 30. The *Dialogo contra i poeti* written by Francesco Berni in 1525 explores, among other topics, the connections between poets and sexuality. He starts by telling Orpheus story’s (from the *Metamorphoses*) charging him first with the “bella inventione,” and then has the interlocutor Sanga list a group of poets famous for their preference for young boys (vv. 206-209). Toward the end of the dialogue Sanga refers to some of the most famous *capitoli* written by Berni including the *Capitolo delle pèsche*. Asked by the interlocutor Marco whether he was a poet or not because he wrote poems such as *Le anguille*, *Le pesche* and *La primiera*, Berni responds that he did not consider himself a poet because of those works and he did not make enemies just for writing them. If he had made enemies it was because he did not concede them homoerotic favors (“Anzi più tosto credo esser voluto male da qualcuno che arà voluto, verbigrazia, ch’i’ gli dia le pèsche, che sapete piacciono a molti, e non gliel’arò potuto dare così presto, e va

interacts with contemporary social and cultural practices and discourses, we cannot consider the discursive choices made by Berni and the other poets to be merely accidental. Writing their *erotica ghiottoneria*, the Vignaiuoli and their imitators mocked the cultural humanistic milieu in which they lived and, at the same time, the popular belief that saw humanism and sodomitical pleasures as strictly connected.<sup>39</sup> Italian literary criticism has recently recognized the centrality of the erotic and homoerotic component in Renaissance poetry and literature in general. It is now considered a topic worthy of analysis in its own right, not as an occasional mere diversion from more “serious” issues.<sup>40</sup> The forbidden fruits of the Renaissance represent often-conflicting beliefs, values and desires expressed by contemporary medical and dietary theory, literature, and everyday practice. Yet, at the same time, they served nicely as a series of Renaissance metaphors that were invested with a rich and playful array of meanings by poets like Berni and his followers. For them, the image of fruits such as peaches and melons was a privileged site to extol sodomy, play with the imagination, and give sodomy a more everyday common sense. As Berni concluded, “but everybody likes the good morsels,”<sup>41</sup> that is, the *buoni bocconi* that *ghiotti* and *ghiottoni* certainly enjoyed.

*The University of Miami*

---

discorrendo.” (*Dialogo contra i poeti*, 212). Can we assume from this literary statement that Berni was a sodomite? Or was it just—like the poems—a literary game to make fun of humanistic circles? Or could it have been a self-defence against sodomy prosecution or perhaps instead a covert admission of his sexual preference? The answer lies in further research on Berni and his circle.

<sup>39</sup> See for instance the following verses from the “Capitolo Primo della fava” by a poet of the *Accademia dei Vignaiuoli*, Giovanni Mauro: “Ma d’onde vien, ch’ ogni poeta canta/ Più tosto i lauri i pampani e le spicche,/ Che questa gloriosa e nobil pianta?/ Come piene veggiam le carte antiche,/ De le picciole mente, e de Priapi,/ Ch’eran così a quella etade amiche/ Così dovremmo noi da mille capi/ Questo frutto cantar, ch’ orna le mense/ Di Duchi, Regi, Imperatori e Papi,/ Ognun’ ne mangia, e non è chi ci pense,/ Et in scriver le pesche, e gli martelli/ Son le voglie de’ poeti intense,/ I quali dovriano di fave e di baccelli/ Non d’hedere, o di lauri ornar la testa/ Alla barba di Cesari e Marcelli.” vv. 31-45. For a modern edition see Marzo, *Note sulla poesia erotica*, 73-84.

<sup>40</sup> See for instance, Marzo, “La lingua come distintivo di genere” and the collection *Queer Italia: Same-Sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film*.

<sup>41</sup> “ma, perché ad ognun piace i buoni bocconi” Berni, “Capitolo delle pèsche” v. 29.

The author wishes to thank the members of the Early Modern Writing Group at the University of Miami, Maria Galli Stampino, Pamela Hammons, Mihoko Suzuki, Anne Cruz, Barbara Woshinski, Mary Lindemann, Richard Godbeer and Guido Ruggiero, as well as the anonymous referees for *Quaderni d'italianistica*, for their valuable suggestions and criticism. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Early Modern Cultural Studies Conference in Orlando, FL, in 2004 and at the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Cambridge, England, in 2005. The author would like to thank the participants at both sessions for their comments and helpful responses, and in particular Will Fisher.

### *Works Cited*

- Augustine. *Confessions*, trans. by William Watts. 2 vols. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Albala, Kent. *Eating Right in the Renaissance*. Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2002.
- Antonino di Firenze (Antonino Pierozzi or St. Antoninus). *Opera di Santo Antonino arcivescovo fiorentino utilissima e necessaria alla instruzione dell'i sacerdoti e di qualunque devota persona la quale desidera saper vivere christiana mente e confessarsi bene della suoi peccati. Con una breve instruzione per li sacerdoti curati*. Vinegia: 1542.
- Aretino, Pietro. "Il Marescalco" pp 4-91 in *Tutte le opere di Pietro Aretino Teatro*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1971.
- Bandello, Matteo. "Il Porcellio romano si prende trastullo di beffar il frate confessandosi," pp.148-55 in *Novelle di Matteo Bandello*, ed. Giuseppe Guido Ferraro. Turin: UTET, 1974.
- Berni, Francesco. "Dialogo contra i poeti," pp. 177-217 in *Renaissance Humanism at the Court of Clement VII* Francesco Berni's Dialogue Against Poets in Context, ed. and trans. Anne Reynolds. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1997.
- "Canzona delle pesche," 2: 482-483, in *Trionfi e Canti carnascialeschi Toscani del Rinascimento*, ed. Riccardo Brusagli. 2 vols. Rome: Salerno, 1986.
- "Capitolo Della Fava," fols. 46-54 in *Il primo Libro dell' Opere Burlesche di M. Francesco Berni, di M. Giovanni della Casa, del Varchi, del Mauro, di M. Bino, del Molza, del Dolce e del Firenzuola, ricorretto e con diligenza ristampato*. In Firenze, 1548.
- "Capitolo di Andrea Lori in nome delle mele," fols. 108-110 in *Delle rime piacevoli del Berni, Copetta, Francesi, Bronzino, Martelli, Domenichi, Strascino e d' altri ingegni simili, piene d' arguzie, motti e sali*. Libro Secondo. Vicenza: Per Barezzo Baretti Libraro in Venetia, 1603.
- Da Messisbugo, Christofaro. "Banchetti, composizioni di vivande et apparecchio generale," pp.287-304 in *L' arte della cucina in Italia. Libri di ricette e trattati sulla civiltà della tavola dal XIV al XIX secolo*, ed. Emilio Faccioli. Turin: Einaudi, 1987.
- Degli Arienti, Giovanni Sabadino. "Novella xxxviii," pp. 328-333 in *Le Porretane*, ed. Bruno Basile. Rome: Salerno, 1981.

- De la vita sobria del magnifico M. Luigi Cornaro, Nobile Vinitiano.* Venice: San Luca al Segno del Diamante, n.d.
- "Del formaggio al lettore buon compagno," fols. 15-19 in *Le Satire et altre rime piacevoli del Signor Hercole Bentivoglio.* Venice: Appresso Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1546.
- De Medici, Lorenzo. "Canzona degli innestatori" 1:10-12, in *Trionfi e canti carnaialeschi toscani del Rinascimento,* ed. Riccardo Bruscagli. 2 vols. Rome: Salerno, 1986.
- Dolce, Lodovico. "Il ragazzo," 2:206-93, in *Commedie del Cinquecento,* ed. Ireneo Sanesi. 2 vols. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1912. Bari: Universale Laterza, 1979.
- Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance,* ed. and trans. Laura Giannetti and Guido Ruggiero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Flandrin, Jean Louis. "From Dietetics to Gastronomy. The Liberation of the Gourmet," pp. 418-432 in *Food. A Culinary History,* eds. Jean Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Flandrin, Jean Louis. "Introduction. The Early Modern Period," pp. 349-373 in *Food. A Culinary History,* eds. Jean Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Francesco Berni. Rime,* ed. Danilo Romei. Milan: Mursia, 1985.
- Francesco Berni,* ed. Raffaele Nigro. Cento Libri per Mille Anni: Connana diretta da Carlo Padullà. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1999.
- Frantz, David O. *Festum Voluptatis. A Study of Renaissance Erotica.* Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1989.
- Garrido, J.P. "Le thème de la 'grande bouffe,' dans le *Morgant* de Luigi Pulci," pp. 73-91 in *La table et ses dessous,* ed. Adelin Charles Fiorato and Anna Fontes Baratto. Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1999.
- Giannetti and Ruggiero, "Introduction," pp. xi-xlii in *Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance,* ed. and trans. by Laura Giannetti and Guido Ruggiero.. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Grieco, Allen. "Food and Social Classes in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy," pp. 302-312 in *Food. A Culinary History,* eds. Jean Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Lettere facete e piacevoli di diversi grandi uomini e chiari ingegni,* ed. Silvia Longhi. Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1991.
- Longhi, Silvia. *Lusus. Il capitolo burlesco nel Cinquecento.* Padova: Antenore, 1983.
- Marzo, Antonio. *Studi sulla poesia erotica del Cinquecento. Con appendice di testi.* Lecce: Adriatica Editrice Salentina, 1999.
- . "La lingua come distintivo di genere: il caso della letteratura erotica del Cinquecento," pp 417-30 in *Atti del Terzo Convegno della Società Italiana di Linguistica e Filologia.* Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1997.
- Molza, Francesco Maria. *Capitoli erotici,* ed. Mirella Masieri. Lecce: Congedo editore, 1999.
- Montanari, Massimo. *La fame e l'abbondanza. Storia dell'alimentazione in Europa.* 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1997. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003.

- Moulton, Ian Frederick. "Introduction. The Greatest Tangle of Pricks There Ever Was: Knowledge, Sex, and Power in Renaissance Italy," pp. 1-70 in Antonio Vignali. *La Cazzaria The Book of the Prick*, ed. and trans. Ian Frederick Moulton. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Nati, Pietro. "Breve discorso intorno alla natura del popone e sopra il cattivo uso del ber fresco con la neve, di Messer Pietro Nati da Bibbiena, Medico e Filosofo," pp. 1-17 in *Modo facile et ispedito da conservarsi sano ne tempi pericolosi della pestilenza. Con altri trattati che si contengono nella faccia seguente*. Florence: Appresso Giorgio Marescotti, 1576.
- Negrisolli Ferrarese, Antonio Mario. "Capitolo delle laudi del poppone," fols. 48-50 in *Delle rime piacevoli del Borgogna, Ruscelli, sansovino, Doni, Lasca, Remigio, Anguillara, Sansedonio e d' altri vivaci ingegni mentre hanno scritto sue inventioni, capricci, fantasie, e ghiribizzi, non meno festevole che leggiadramente. Libro terzo*. Vicenza: Per Barezzo Barezzi Libraro in Venetia, 1603.
- Olsen, Thomas G. "Poisoned Figs and Italian Sallets: Nation, Diet, and the Early Modern English Traveler." *Annali d' italianistica*, ed. Luigi Monga, vol. 21 (2003): 233-254.
- Palma, Pina. "Of Courtesans, Knights, Cooks and Writers: Food in the Renaissance," *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 119 (2004) : 37-48.
- Platina. *On Right Pleasure and Good Health*, book I, ed and trans. Mary Ellen Milham. Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998.
- Queer Italia: Same-Sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film, ed Gary Cestaro. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2004.
- Regole della sanità e natura de' cibi di Ugo Benzo Senese, arricchite di vaghe annotazioni e di copiosi discorsi, naturali e morali dal signor Lodovico Bertaldi Medico delle Serenissime Altezze di Savoia*. Turin: n.p., 1620.
- Rocke, Michael. *Forbidden Friendships. Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- . "Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy," pp. 150-170 in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis. New York: Longman, 1998.
- Romei, Danilo. "Roma 1532-1537: Accademia per burla e poesia 'tolta in gioco'" pp. 49-84 in Danilo Romei, *Berni e Berneschi del Cinquecento*. Firenze: Edizioni Centro 2P, 1984.
- . "Introduzione," pp. 5-18 in Francesco Berni, *Rime*, ed. Danilo Romei. Milan: Mursia, 1985.
- Rosenberger, Bernard. "Arab Cuisine and Its Contributions to European Culture," pp. 207-223, in *Food. A Culinary History*, eds. Jean Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Ruggiero, Guido. *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- . "Marriage, Love, Sex and Renaissance Civic Morality," pp.10-30 in *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe. Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

- Savonarola, Michele. *Libreto de tute le cosse che se manzano. Un libro di dietetica di Michele Savonarola, medico padovano del sec. XV.*, ed. Jane Nystedt. Stockholm: doctoral thesis, Stockholms Universitets, 1982.
- Toscan, Jean. *Le Carnaval du langage. Le lexique érotique des poètes de l'équivoque de Burchiello à Marino (xv-xvii siècle)*. Tome I-IV. Doctoral thesis, Université de Paris III, 1978.

# DRAMMATURGIA E SACRE SCRITTURE NELL'ETÀ DEI LUMI

FRANCESCO S. MINERVINI

Lungo tutto il corso del XVIII secolo si assiste alla febbre ricerca di un modello drammaturgico innovativo; il ‘secolo investigante’ volgeva cioè la sua peculiare ansia di rinnovamento e il sentimento totalizzante di un’esperienza di razionalizzazione verso una revisione globale e rifondante della scena barocca, afflitta in questa visione da un generale ripiegamento sullo spettacolarismo del gesto come della parola. Si intendeva, quindi, restaurare una drammaturgia *regolata*, finalmente creata non già dall’attore ma per l’attore (Ferrone, 821). In questo senso da un lato l’avvento del libretto sopperiva al cattivo gusto della recitazione all’improvviso (che pure aveva goduto di largo credito e favore del gusto popolare e cortigiano nell’Europa seicentesca) e dall’altro finalmente si intuiva la portata della considerazione del ‘teatro come metafora del reale’.

Occasioni e struttura del teatro naturalmente andavano riflettendo lo stato della società settecentesca, ancora cadenzata da una gran messe di ricorrenze liturgiche che ne scandivano (e segnavano profondamente) la successione temporale e le opportunità di incontri culturali. Si pensi che sul finire del secolo lo stesso papa Pio VI dovette intervenire per limitare il numero delle ricorrenze liturgiche (a Roma nel 1770 se ne contavano più di cento): la processione del Santo Chiodo data a Milano o la festività dei Santi Pietro e Paolo il 29 giugno a Roma mostravano la potenzialità della solennità scenica che a queste ricorrenze era tradizionalmente riservata. La città eterna, peraltro, favoriva questi eventi teatrali, basti pensare alla piazza Santi Apostoli o piazza Farnese, veri e propri impianti scenografici all’aperto, immediatamente presenti alla disponibilità dell’organizzazione culturale. Si aggiunga poi che nelle feste di patronato l’occasione per la divulgazione liturgica e la trattazione scritturistica si innervavano nella tensione oppositiva al dilagante giansenismo e in sostegno agli ordini religiosi pesantemente messi in crisi ed offuscati dai nuovi stili di vita in via di affermazione<sup>1</sup>.

Tuttavia, la scena italiana appariva mortificata da un lato dalla mancanza di attori veri e dall’altro dall’assenza di una consapevole progettual-

---

<sup>1</sup>Si veda a riguardo *Orfeo in Arcadia* oppure *La festa a Roma dal Rinascimento al 1870*.

ità teatrale in grado di contrastare e finalmente debellare la supremazia dell'ormai troppo abusata Commedia dell'Arte che aveva cancellato (peraltro a vantaggio del melodramma e dell'opera buffa) il lavoro intellettuale intorno a temi e situazioni più confacenti alla nuova realtà politica, sociale e morale del XVIII secolo. I mille difetti del teatro, la scarsezza di forza dei repertori svuotati di ogni pregnanza morale erano già stati messi in evidenza da L.A. Muratori quando nel 1706, trattando *Della perfetta poesia italiana*, aveva indicato nei repertori vuoti e privi di forza la responsabilità della mancanza in Italia di tragedie che potessero porsi in gara con gli esempi più luminosi della *drammaturgie classique* francese e che ne ripetessero (eguagliandola o magari superandola) l'elevata dignità. Muratori argomentava le sue tesi focalizzando l'attenzione sulla carenza o addirittura assenza di tensione ideologica nella drammaturgia e nella pratica teatrale italiana; secondo un'indicazione che poi sarà ampiamente condivisa e pugnacemente sostenuta dai teorici di poetica teatrale (Martello, Gravina e Quadrio) si andava definitivamente affermando l'esigenza di trasformare la pratica teatrale da 'puro divertimento a spettacolo di cultura'<sup>2</sup>. In questo senso opera la diffusione delle traduzioni e delle imitazioni del teatro francese secentesco<sup>3</sup>, di Corneille e di Racine in primo luogo (*Ifigenia in Aulide* di Racine e *Rodoguna* di Corneille), testimoniato dalle opere di Gasparo Gozzi, Francesco Albergati Capacelli, Giuseppe Baretti e Melchiorre Cesarotti.

Il maggior merito di Muratori era stato indubbiamente quello di avere compreso e mostrato la necessità di una innovazione e rivisitazione delle teorie tragiche<sup>4</sup> che finalmente contemplassero, pur nell'adesione alla norma aristotelica<sup>5</sup>, l'apertura alle più moderne elaborazioni come quella di Voltaire o più in là quella di Lessing, soprattutto quando intorno alla metà del secolo si affermò tanto in sede religiosa quanto in campo laico la discussione

---

<sup>2</sup> Per la trattatistica sui teatri cfr. Marotti, *Lo spazio scenico*.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Ferrari, *Le traduzioni italiane del teatro tragico francese*; Mangini, "Il teatro tragico francese in Italia"; Meregazzi, *Le tragedie di Pierre Corneille*; De Angelis, *Critiche, traduzioni ed imitazioni del teatro di G. Racine*; De Carli, *Riflessi francesi nell'opera di Saverio Bettinelli*.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Bertana, "La tragedia"; Id., "Il teatro tragico italiano del secolo XVIII prima dell'Alfieri"; Binni, "L'aspirazione al teatro tragico"; Doglio, *Il teatro tragico italiano*; Galletti, "Le teorie drammatiche e la tragedia nel secolo XVIII prima dell'Alfieri"; Mattioda, *Le teorie della tragedia nel Settecento*; Brizzi, "Caratteri ed evoluzione del teatro di collegio italiano"; Carlson, *Teorie del teatro*; Luciani, *Le passioni e gli affetti*.

<sup>5</sup> Ariani, "L'osessione delle 'regole' e il disordine degli 'affetti'".

sione intorno ai concetti di compassione e terrore, orrore e meraviglia, passione amorosa. Alle teorie tragiche si accompagnava inoltre il tentativo di giustificare o quanto meno spiegare le motivazioni della tragedia a lieto fine che si andava via via affermando, riscuotendo soprattutto il favore degli ambienti più attenti alle indicazioni morali della religione cristiana<sup>6</sup>.

Nel 1716 Gian Vincenzo Gravina (*Della tragedia*) poneva la questione della superiorità del modello tragico greco su quello latino e della irrinunciabilità delle unità aristoteliche, accordando il suo favore alla tragedia di argomento storico, la quale poteva tra l'altro assolvere una funzione spiccatamente politica. Una posizione questa naturalmente non condivisibile dagli autori guidati da una più convinta fede cristiana o ispirati da quella morale. Nel 1729 infatti Annibale Marchese pubblicava le sue *Tragedie cristiane*, una raccolta di drammi sacri nel pieno rispetto delle unità aristoteliche e nel 1732 Giulio Cesare Becelli nel trattare *Della novella poesia* argomentava sulla necessità di fondere il nocciolo tematico della tragedia cristiana con la norma strutturale aristotelica. Queste posizioni collidono naturalmente con quelle dei ‘modernisti’ come Gorini Corio, Gian Rinaldo Carli<sup>7</sup>, Pier Jacopo Martello<sup>8</sup>, Antonio Conti e Scipione Maffei, convinti invece della ineguagliabile superiorità del modello tragico francese.

Se le due correnti paiono almeno esteriormente non trovare punti di contatto, l'*entusiasmo per la virtù* sembra invece avvicinarle; l'adesione illuministica al sensismo e la spiccata attenzione ai valori etici e alla moralità (e moralizzazione) teatrale della società finiscono col convergere intorno alle potenzialità educative della pratica teatrale. Tra i primi a cogliere tali possibilità pedagogiche furono naturalmente i Gesuiti, tenaci amministratori di collegi e centri di formazione di vario livello, aperti tuttavia a raccolgere non soltanto le istanze della religione cristiana ma anche le sollecitazioni etiche della drammaturgia francese secentesca, di cui proposero numerosi adattamenti e traduzioni<sup>9</sup>.

La produzione drammaturgica dei Gesuiti si connota tra il 1770 e il 1773 per un “ritorno pressoché corale ai temi biblici”<sup>10</sup>, con un’adesione a tematiche spirituali di edificazione morale e di preparazione retorica per gli

---

<sup>6</sup>Cfr. Sannia Nowé, “Epifanie e metamorfosi”; Minervini, “L’etica aristotelica”.

<sup>7</sup>Carli, *Dell’indole del teatro tragico antico e moderno*.

<sup>8</sup>Cfr. Martello, *Della tragedia antica e moderna*.

<sup>9</sup>Cfr. Simioni, *Per la storia del teatro gesuitico*; Ferrari, “Appunti sul teatro tragico dei Gesuiti”; Scaduto, “Il teatro gesuitico”; *I Gesuiti e i primordi del teatro barocco in Europa*.

<sup>10</sup>See *Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance*. 166, n. 139

educandi a calcare la scena politica futura; prova ne siano le tragedie di Anton Maria Ambrogi (*Morte di Gionata Maccabeo e Gioas*, riadattamenti di tragedie di Voltaire) e di Simon Maria Poggi che ‘copia’ l’*Idomeneo* di Crebillon, pur depurandolo dall’elemento sentimentale, e quelle di Giuseppe Carpani (*Sannacherib*), di Davide Scotti (*David*).

La scelta della tragedia a lieto fine agiva proprio nella direzione della conciliazione tra il modello teatrale francese e le istanze moralistiche religiose; ma d’altro canto essa serviva anche ad allontanare quel ‘fatalismo’ della tragedia greca che era divenuto simbolo e sostegno ideologico per un dilagante giansenismo che sposava le tesi della redenzione e del libero arbitrio.

I *seminaria nobilium*, sedi degli educandati gesuitici, divenivano luoghi di elezione per la produzione e spesso anche sperimentazione teatrale illuministica italiana: si pensi al San Luigi di Bologna o a quello dei Nobili di Parma, dove operarono il genovese Giovanni Granelli (1703-1770), il teorizzatore della *tragedia religiosa*, e poco più tardi il maggiore tragico della Compagnia, Saverio Bettinelli. Sin dalle sue prime opere, Granelli si era mostrato attento interprete dell’esigenza del rinnovamento teatrale e della tragedia religiosa che intendeva ravvivare per il tramite della scrittura versificata, accompagnandola con il genere delle ‘lezioni sacre di argomento scritturistico’ come momento preparatorio alla ponderosità interpretativa del tema sulla scena teatrale. Predicatore di corte a Vienna presso Maria Teresa d’Austria, Granelli compose nel 1761 *Seila figlia di Jefte*, tragedia d’argomento israelita; nell’attività presso la corte imperiale, dunque, si andavano fondendo l’adesione a questioni politico-mecenaticistiche con l’imprescindibile austerità della tematica scritturistica: in quest’ottica forse si deve anche spiegare la convinzione di Granelli che “le virtù di una tragedia vi sono solo se c’è il favore del pubblico” (Prefazione a *Seila*, VIII). Parole nelle quali vibra il desiderio di cogliere il favore della committenza e ad un tempo anche quello del pubblico, nella speranzosa convinzione umanistica di giovare tanto alla prima nella gestione illuminata del potere, quanto alla edificazione morale dell’uditario.

Si era ormai concretizzato lo scarto con il passato, la mutazione del gusto cominciava a dare i suoi effetti concreti: ciò che muoveva l’uditario e gli scrittori di teatro, che pervadeva l’intera società a partire dal Settecento e che si approfondirà nel dibattito romantico era, dunque, “un sentimento profondo e sublime che scaturisce dalla meditazione sui grandi temi del destino umano, del rapporto fra l’uomo e Dio, l’uomo e il tempo, l’uomo e le forze della natura, o che a quella meditazione sospinge” (Puppo, 51).

La scelta del meraviglioso cristiano necessitava, tuttavia, di essere modificata e plasmata per poter coesistere col sistema drammaturgico classico,

fortemente intriso di strutture e tematiche decisamente pagane; così come anche la scelta della tematica scritturistica era tuttavia indirizzata al perseguitamento di obiettivi pedagogici e pratici di natura laica, sollevando anche in questo caso l'inquisitoria attenzione delle gerarchie ecclesiastiche, chiaramente preoccupate di scongiurare devianti forzature interpretative e rappresentative del testo biblico<sup>11</sup>. Interprete delle ansie rigoristiche religiose, il padre Daniele Concina, pensatore e rigido teorico, si fece portavoce dell'esigenza di un rinnovato rigorismo cattolico<sup>12</sup>, vietando l'introduzione sulle scene dei Collegi delle figure femminili e battendosi per una tragedia aristotelicamente 'regolata' e sorvegliata nella morale. Certamente di fronte a tale intransigenza, la scelta di Granelli di attingere alla storia d'Israele e di intitolare una rappresentazione drammaturgica ad una figura femminile (*Seila*) doveva naturalmente suscitare preoccupazioni fra i Padri Generali dell'Ordine. Saverio Bettinelli, il maggior drammaturgo della Compagnia, ricorse invece ad un sapiente artifizio retorico; nelle sue tragedie (*Gionata figlio di Saul*; *Demetrio Poliorcete*; *Serse re di Persia*) le donne non appaiono mai direttamente sulla scena, eppure esse sono ugualmente rappresentate, descritte e fatte rivivere attraverso i racconti e nelle parole dei protagonisti maschili: esemplare il caso della madre di Gionata che giunge a suscitare in sollevazione il popolo contro l'intento — dichiarato irremovibile — di Saul di uccidere suo figlio, senza però che tale parte sia sostenuta da un attore sulla scena; e ancora secondo il modello dell'apparizione di Nino nella *Semiramis* di Voltaire, Amestri moglie di *Serse re di Persia* da lui stesso assassinata in nome della ragion di Stato continua ad aggirarsi intorno al tiranno afflitto, a lasciare tracce materiali della sua esistenza (un brandello delle vesti, una lettera segreta) come farà anche Stratonica, figlia di *Demetrio*, innamorata di Cleomene, primogenito del nemico arconte ateniese Timandro. Bettinelli, come si vede, è riuscito nell'intento di mantenere fede alle istanze moralistiche dettate dalla *Ratio studiorum* e contemporaneamente di salvare tanto la fedeltà al testo (biblico o storico), quanto quella ai bisogni della rappresentazione. È però singolare come i drammaturghi gesuiti ricorrono più di frequente alla storia laica (greca o romana) piuttosto che a quella scritturistica; solo marginale appare infatti a detta dello stesso Bettinelli la prova del *Gionata figlio di Saul*; nel

---

11 "Tragoediarum, et Comoediarum, quae non nisi latinas, ac rarissimas esse oportet, argumentum sacrum sit, ac pium, neque quicquam actibus interponantur, quod non latinum sit, et decorum; nec persona ulla muliebris, vel habitus introducantur": *Regulae Rectoris n. 13, Ratio studiorum et Institutiones Scholasticae Societatis Jesu*.

12 Concina, *De spectaculis*; Id., *De' teatri moderni contrari alla professione cristiana*.

*Discorso del teatro italiano* il gesuita ammette i limiti strutturali della sua unica tragedia di argomento biblico, per ‘fiacchezza di stile’ e per una troppo pedissequa imitazione della linea tragica Euripide-Racine, esprimendosi in questi termini:

In quanto a me protesto d’aver tentato seguir queste tracce, ben conoscendomi assai fiacco ne’ miei talenti, come il sono in sanità di temperamento. Nel *Gionata* è molto di morale come nell’*Ifigenia* d’Euripide e in alcune scene di lui e di Racine. Quest’era pel primo un argomento sacro, non pel secondo, onde questi usò meno della morale che non il primo, ch’io dovea seguire nel *Gionata*. E perciò presi uno stile più grandioso e poetico sulla scorta de’ greci e d’Eschilo principalmente<sup>13</sup>.

Al centro della drammaturgia di collegio opera dunque una forte tensione non solo tematica verso il modello scritturistico che consustanzia la scelta della materia e la cristianizzazione del meraviglioso; ma accanto a ciò è indiscutibile l’attenzione moralistico-pedagogica nei confronti degli educandi considerati nel loro essere “giovani scelti per un grande scopo”<sup>14</sup>.

La tragedia biblica assume allora contorni *sui generis*; l’afflato tragico del modello classico greco si stempera via via in una pacata riconciliazione finale, che tende ad uno scioglimento del nodo tragico che muta il volto tetro e cruento, misterioso e punitivo del Fato in quello salvifico e benevolo della grazia della Provvidenza, anche ammettendo l’inserimento di un intreccio risolutivo alternativo.

Nella tenuta ideologica della tragedia si agita, inoltre, il consueto dibattito intorno al verisimile; la notevole produzione di tragedie d’argomento biblico poneva com’è ovvio la questione di un verisimile, quello cristiano, che si innalzasse a competere con lo statuto aristotelico storicamente dominante<sup>15</sup>. Le tragedie scritturistiche di Granelli e Bettinelli mostrano il tentativo programmatico di introduzione sulla scena tragica di un meraviglioso cristiano capace di contemplare al suo interno tanto la statura aristotelica dell’eroe tragico, quanto la natura decisamente meno conflittuale dell’eroe (o *martire*) cristiano. Il conflitto tragico delle tragedie bibliche è naturalmente di gran lunga meno profondo dei corrispettivi d’ispirazione classica: i protagonisti della tragedia antica e di quella d’argo-

---

<sup>13</sup>Bettinelli, “Discorso sopra il teatro italiano” pp. 1134-1135; anche cfr. Bonora, “Le tragedie e la poetica del tragico di Saverio Bettinelli”.

<sup>14</sup>Così Samuele a Gionata nel *Gionata, figlio di Saul* (I, 6) di Saverio Bettinelli, in Bettinelli, *Tomo sesto*.

<sup>15</sup>Cfr. Bancheri, *Polemiche sulla tragedia sacra*, pp. 177-181.

mento storico greco o romano non sono certamente paragonabili alla quasi irreale drittura morale dei personaggi biblici; in essi vibra un'aura di perfezione che mal si concilia con le richieste istituzionali della tragedia aristotelica. Manca tanto la grandezza della colpa tragica, quanto la basezza degli eroi ‘fallibili’ da cui risorgere. Nel primo caso si tratta infatti di colpa o ‘errori’ (veri sviamenti dalla retta via) di piccola entità, assai spesso inconsapevolmente commessi come nel *Gionata* di Bettinelli, o ancor più come per l’innocente *Manasse* di Granelli<sup>16</sup>. I “giovani scelti per un grande scopo”, protagonisti e referenti della drammaturgia gesuitica, sono preventivamente riconosciuti in possesso di un eroismo o eroicità per definizione anti-tragica: essi non possono che mostrare la perfettibilità della loro già perfetta condizione morale attraverso un percorso di redenzione-riconoscimento dell’errore, della colpa tragica, già scritto e provvidenzialmente disposto. Colpa ed errore tragico allora assumono connotati ‘esclusivamente’ biblici: laddove all’eroe classico (più verosimilmente) era lasciato l’arbitrio di sbagliare e redimersi, originando un nodo tragico il cui scioglimento era tanto più forte e catarticamente efficace quanto maggiore lo sbaglio, all’eroe cristiano è dato soltanto remissivamente interpretare un ruolo già scritto, dogmaticamente immodificabile per sua stessa natura.

Con la produzione gesuitica cui andrà anche accostato per comunione d’intenti il *Giovanni di Giscala* di Alfonso Varano e la proliferazione della tragedia biblica anche di autori non religiosi, si assiste a un progressivo scarto anche sul campo del verisimile tra il versante cristiano da un lato e quello classico di derivazione storica dall’altro.

Più volte nel Settecento questo problema ha suscitato l’attenzione della critica sin dalla polemica tra Varano e Metastasio, coinvolgendo a vario titolo filosofi o tragediografi. Quel che qui interessa è tuttavia un altro punto: ci si deve interrogare sulle motivazioni che hanno ad esempio Bettinelli, allievo del “Sofocle redivivo” Granelli, a rinunciare alla tragedia scritturistica per dedicarsi ad argomenti della storia greco-persiana (Demetrio e Serse) ed invece un autore di estrazione ‘laica’ come Alfieri ad assumere il cimento biblico.

La tragediabilità del *Saul* “come soggetto sacro” giungeva, infatti, in Alfieri nella primavera del 1782 a seguito di quello che egli stesso ebbe a definire un vero *invasamento*<sup>17</sup>; la scelta del racconto del primo libro di Samuele aveva ovviamente per Bettinelli altre ragioni. Per il gesuita man-

---

<sup>16</sup>Granelli, *Manasse Re Di Giuda. Sedecia Ultimo Re Di Giuda. Dione Siracusano.*

<sup>17</sup>Alfieri, *Vita IV*, 9, pp. 196-197; si veda, inoltre, *Parere su Saul*, in Alfieri, *Parere sulle tragedie e altre prosse critiche*.

tovano, il *Gionata* rappresenta l'esordio tragico, innervato naturalmente nel solco della tradizione gesuitica che egli stesso contribuì a sostenere. La preferenza accordata al tema scritturistico appariva scontata, quasi come per una forma di devozionale osservanza della norma spirituale, retorica, pedagogica e teatrale della *Ratio* di Sant'Ignazio di Loyola<sup>18</sup>. Il *Gionata* appare tutto calibrato sulla figura del 'figlio di Saul' come recita il titolo stesso, nel chiaro intento di mostrare le qualità salvifiche in terra come per la beatitudine finale della remissiva e pacata accettazione del volere superiore di Saul, re sulla terra, e ancor più di quello di Dio, il re dei re. La conformità del comportamento di Gionata (inconsapevolmente macchiatosi di una colpa oggettivamente 'minore' come l'aver attinto una stilla di miele durante la battaglia) ad un canone etico riconosciuto come l'unico valido dai committenti, dall'autore e dagli attori-spettatori è l'autorappresentazione di una realtà chiusa e autoreferenziale che si specchia in se stessa. Una realtà che doveva apparire certamente ristretta allo stesso Bettinelli che subito dopo abbandonerà la tematica biblica in favore di quella storica, per potersi più chiaramente e liberamente dedicare alla questione politica e sociale più evidente nel *Serse* e nel *Demetrio* e che segue più da vicino la tradizione gesuitica della letteratura sulla Ragion di Stato<sup>19</sup>.

La rigida e dogmatica definizione della storia biblica, l'immodificabilità di una *fabula* preventivamente accettata, l'impossibilità di plasmare il 'meraviglioso cristiano' (che nel *Gionata* si concretizza nel 'provvidenziale' sollevamento popolare provocato dalla vigorosa e tenace determinazione della madre del protagonista eponimo) dovevano indubbiamente apparire coercitive sia sul piano tematico sia su quello dell'adeguamento alle strutture normative delle unità aristoteliche e soprattutto carenti nella tensione politica e sociale che gli educandi stessi avrebbero incontrato sulla scena della vita reale.

La *quaestio* era assai dibattuta e non è qui il caso di ricordare un conflitto di ragioni che dalla *Poetica* di Aristotele si inasprisce nel Cinquecento e si protrae sino alla nascita del dramma borghese. Certamente è più interessante soffermarsi sui modi di intendere e sviluppare la materia vetero-testamentaria tra i Gesuiti da un lato e un autore 'laico' come 'Alfieri' dall'altro. Resta valido pertanto a mio avviso il discernimento che a proposito diede Attilio Simioni a proposito del gesuita Giovan Battista Roberti (1719-1786): "Il soggetto biblico, in mano d'un vero tragico, o forse anche del Bettinelli stesso, se le regole ed il fine non gli avessero inceppate spesse volte le mani, si sarebbe prestato, se non ad un intreccio fortemente drammatico,

---

<sup>18</sup>Cfr. *I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*.

<sup>19</sup>Cfr. *Ragion di Stato a Teatro*.

certo ad un'azione molto più vivace di colorito affettivo e passionale” (Simioni, 15). Simioni parlava dell’*Adonia* (1734) di G.B. Roberti, la cui fonte biblica è la medesima del *Gionata* di Bettinelli e del *Saul* alfieriano, ovvero “la fatale persecuzione di Dio” contro la casa dei regnanti di Israele (Simioni, 13). Mi preme segnalare, prima di giungere al confronto con l’Alfieri, che nonostante la tenuta tematica tutta incentrata sulla storia biblica, queste opere mostrano un afflato del tutto peculiare ed all’altro rispetto alla loro natura esteriore; voglio dire che pur in un contesto biblico (il più vicino alla tradizione e alla cultura di questi tragediografi) l’attenzione principale pare riservata al tema del potere, del conflitto con l’animo umano e più in generale alla discussione sulla Ragion di Stato che aveva già riscosso in passato l’attenzione di gesuiti come Botero e Traiano Boccalini. Né si può tralasciare che la drammatizzazione del *Saul* giungeva non soltanto dopo l’“invasamento” biblico del 1782, ma soprattutto alla fine di un percorso ideologico e letterario che già lo aveva portato l’Alfieri alla profondità della riflessione sulla *Tirannide* (1777), alla composizione delle cosiddette ‘tragedie della libertà’ (*Virginia*, *Timoleone*, *La congiura dei pazzi*, 1777-1779), alla trattazione *Del principe e delle lettere* e di seguito del *Filippo*, concepito già nel 1777 ma terminato insieme col *Polinice* nel 1783<sup>20</sup>.

Se prendiamo in esame anche le opere di Granelli come il *Sedecia*, ben si comprende tale ipotesi: Sedecia — la cui vicenda è narrata in II, Cronache 36: 11-21 — è la raffigurazione teatrale di una dimensione umana pienamente ‘politica’ e in tal senso peculiarmente valida a livello pedagogico come ‘vita negativa’, ovvero come fulgido esempio etico da rifiutare e attraverso cui educare antifrasticamente al bene gli allievi; così appare, secondo categorie di giudizio delle *Vite parallele* di Plutarco, il giovanissimo (appena ventunenne) re di Gerusalemme, Sedecia, un tempo fedele vassallo di Nabucodonosor, quindi (nel 588 a. C.) passato dalla parte del faraone Hofra, quindi fatalmente espostosi alla vendetta del primo; puntualmente, come in ossequio ad una legge immodificabile della politica, tale vendetta ebbe luogo con la presa di Gerusalemme da parte del sovrano babilonese il quale procedette ad uccidere i figli di Sedecia in sua stessa presenza, accecato e ridotto in vincoli. La drammaticità dell’evento storico-biblico dell’ultimo re di Giuda comprende nel suo intreccio la constatazione della bramosia umana di potere, dell’attaccamento ostinato ad esso, nonché il conflitto tra il volere supremo di Dio e la *hybris* dell’uomo, la contrapposizione tra il cieco furore del potente e la visione della sofferenza dei figli, biblicamente ricettori delle colpevoli malvagità paterne.

---

<sup>20</sup>Cfr. *Alfieri tragico*.

Il tema ricorre anche in *Manasse*, altra tragedia del padre Granelli, il quale divenne re di Giuda (699-639 a.C.) succedendo appena dodicenne al padre Ezechia. A lui la tradizione vetero-testamentaria assegna la responsabilità di una persecuzione da parte dei profeti, episodio ricordato anche nel *Saul* alfieriano, sebbene portato dall'astigiano al limite più estremo della tragediabilità<sup>21</sup>.

È chiaro quindi che la scelta comune dei drammaturghi gesuiti sul soggetto da rappresentare non fosse casuale: sia nella produzione di Granelli che di Bettinelli la vicenda d'ispirazione biblica è fucina di soggetti dalle caratteristiche ricorrenti; giovani re o figli di re, immediatamente o direttamente coinvolti nella gestione del potere, rivolti al raggiungimento dello stesso o al suo mantenimento. Il tragico cristiano di queste opere appare perciò inevitabilmente compromesso con la sfera della politica (o della Ragion di Stato), chiaramente diretto ad un'edificazione e a un miglioramento dell'*animus* degli educandi non soltanto in ambito spirituale ma soprattutto per ciò che concerne il potere e l'amministrazione di uno Stato, compiti cioè che i rampolli delle famiglie più importanti avrebbero con ogni probabilità assunto su di sé nel corso della vita.

In questo senso deve anche essere giustificata la forte virata in favore della storia ‘laica’ di Bettinelli che dall'esordio del *Gionata* passa al *Demetrio Poliorcete* e quindi al *Serse re di Persia*; ho mostrato altrove che la scelta non fu affatto casuale, ma determinata direttamente dalla vita politica (e anche culturale) di Filippo di Borbone nel ducato di Parma e dal suo ministro Guillame du Tillot<sup>22</sup>. In questa attenzione alla realtà politica, al mondo contemporaneo, nell'anelito a una maggiore umanità e umanizzazione del potere si concretizza “un tragico moderno e tutto gesuitico, che mira alla ‘correzion del costume’ e, al di là del semplice didascalismo, crede nell'esemplarità della storia sacra”<sup>23</sup>. E in tale esemplarità — io aggiungerei ‘politica’ — della storia sacra aveva confidato anche Alfieri per il più famoso *Saul* prima (1783) e per l'*Abele* (postumo 1790), ma anche Alfonso Varano nel *Giovanni di Giscala*<sup>24</sup> o Giovan Battista Roberti per l'*Adonia*<sup>25</sup>,

---

<sup>21</sup>Cfr. Masiello, *L'ideologia tragica di Vittorio Alfieri*.

<sup>22</sup>Cfr. Tiranni a teatro.

<sup>23</sup>Zanlonghi, *Teatri di formazione*, p. 307; si veda inoltre Zanlonghi, “Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica”, pp. 159-190.

<sup>24</sup>Cfr. Varano, *Giovanni di Giscala*.

<sup>25</sup>Cfr. Sandonà, *Ragione e carità*. L'opera è del 1757, ed in essa si descrive l'ambizione di Adonia, primogenito della casa di David, di essere unto re mentre Dio aveva predestinato Salomone, il figlio di Betsabea; il pentito ravvedimento di

o lo stesso Pietro Metastasio che nel 1732 compose *La morte di Abel*. Dunque il tema era assai diffuso e direi anche in misura sorprendente se solo si considera che siamo in piena età illuministica e ci si spinge addirittura appena a ridosso delle sollevazioni rivoluzionarie francesi. Ma questo tema, per contro, assume nelle singole menti sfaccettature e inclinazioni differenti eppure riconducibili ad un bisogno primario comune.

Il *tragico cristiano*<sup>26</sup> adottato da Alfieri per il *Saul* poteva certamente contare su quella “venerabilità preventiva” che egli stesso denunciava come imprescindibile tramite per la ‘vera tragedia’, giudicando la modernità impossibilitata ontologicamente a produrre e quindi rappresentare eroi compiutamente tragici. Così in *Abele* l’attenzione del tragico è rivolta a colpire e suscitare i sensi (non solo l’intelletto) del pubblico e in *Saul* la ragionevolezza del re è offuscata dalla soverchieria (predominante anche a costo della vita) del potere. Ma laddove il conflitto delle passioni del primo Alfieri<sup>27</sup> e in generale della drammaturgia gesuitica si era incentrato su una rappresentazione del potere chiusa nel conflitto contenuto nell’idea stessa di potere e cioè nello scontro tra lo Stato e gli affetti familiari, tra la legge politica e quella affettiva, il *Saul* appare slegarsi da ogni vincolo di natura terrena, per spostare ancora più su il livello dello scontro. Laddove, cioè, la drammaturgia gesuitica si era incentrata in particolare su una corretta gestione del potere (naturalmente ispirata da contenuti morali della religione cristiana attraverso la mediazione della *magnanimità* della drammaturgia classica seicentesca) giungendo alla scelta della storia laica dopo un percorso letterario-ideologico pienamente cristiano, Alfieri invece (con un processo tematico esattamente inverso) scardina dall’interno l’idea stessa del potere, depurandolo da qualsivoglia contatto terreno; il *Saul* alfieriano appare allora conforme solo esteriormente alla trattazione ‘politica’ dei gesuiti, e la tematica biblica rappresenta un mero tramite contenutistico per un progetto ideologico ben più elevato. Ciò rappresenta piuttosto l’estrema assolutizzazione del conflitto intrinseco al potere stesso: Alfieri sposta l’oggetto della trattazione dal piano squisitamente politico dell’amministrazione terrena a quello ideologico della sacralità regale di Saul, impegnato a difendere la sua condizione di re non da oscuri nemici interni alla corte, ministri machiavellici o nemici più potenti; l’intento di Saul è

---

Adonia per la paura dell’ira divina mette fine alla saga che si conclude con il riconoscimento di Salomone come legittimo re.

<sup>26</sup>Cfr. Barberi Squarotti, *Il tragico cristiano*; si veda, inoltre, Ghidetti in *Alfieri tragico*, pp. 637-655.

<sup>27</sup>Cfr. Santato, *Tra mito e palinodia; Barsotti, Alfieri e la scena*.

quello di conservare in eterno la sua regalità, sfidando nell'estremo duello Dio stesso e individuando nel suicidio il tramite per l'eternazione della sua condizione di re. Laddove il teatro gesuitico e la precedente produzione alfieriana si erano attestati su una dimensione tutta terrena della questione politica, con il *Saul* tutto è assolutizzato: il concetto stesso di potere-regalità, la sfida, la punizione la soluzione finale: "Empia Filiste, / me troverai, ma almen da re, qui ... morto." Un re che muore sulla sua stessa spada (volutamente modificando in questo punto la narrazione biblica che invece descrive la decapitazione come opera dei Filistei, *Samuele I*, 4-10), è un re non vinto, la cui corona rotola nella polvere e nel sangue ancora e per sempre sul capo di Saul; la morte del re suicida è, dunque, il tramite per l'assoluto: Saul sarà per sempre re e non il profeta Samuele, non David e nemmeno Dio potranno mai privarlo della sua regalità. Il contesto politico che premeva con la sua urgenza sulla produzione teatrale dei gesuiti perde i tratti della immediata contingenza nel *Saul* di Alfieri che, invece, vi aveva dedicato le 'tragedie della libertà' e la produzione trattatistica; resta tuttavia nella tragedia più luminosa dell'astigiano la consapevolezza dell'ingombrante e irremovibile presenza del mondo politico nella vita dell'uomo come nella riflessione del letterato, apprendo definitivamente il campo alla drammaturgia borghese e risorgimentale dell'Ottocento e riaffermando con 'aristocratico distacco', proprio attraverso la mediazione tematica delle sacre scritture, l'imprescindibilità dell'antico principio umanistico degli intellettuali guida e *lume* — è il caso di dirlo — per il potere.

*Università di Bari*

#### *Opere citate*

- Alfieri tragico, a cura di Enrico Ghidetti e Roberta Turchi. Firenze: Le Lettere, 2003 (numero speciale de *La Rassegna della Letteratura Italiana*, 107:2 (luglio-dicembre 2003)).
- Alfieri, Vittorio. *Vita*, a cura di Giampaolo Dossena. Torino: Einaudi, 1974.
- Alfieri, Vittorio, *Parere sulle tragedie e altre prose critiche*, a cura di Morena Pagliai. Asti: Casa d'Alferi, 1978.
- Ariani, Marco. "L'ossessione delle 'regole' e il disordine degli 'affetti': lineamenti di una teoria illuministica del teatro tragico" in *Il teatro italiano del Settecento*, a cura di Gerardo Guccini. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988, pp. 121-148.
- Bancheri, Salvatore. "Polemiche sulla tragedia sacra regolare fra Sei e Settecento" in *Romance Languages Annual*, 2 (1990): 177-181.
- Barberi Squarotti, Giorgio. *Il tragico cristiano. Da Dante ai moderni*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2003.
- Barsotti, Anna. *Alfieri e la scena. Da fantasmi di personaggi a fantasmi di spettatori*. Roma: Bulzoni, 2001.

- Bertana, Emilio. *La tragedia. "Storia dei generi letterari italiani."* Milano: Vallardi, 1905.
- Bertana, Emilio. "Il teatro tragico italiano del secolo XVIII prima dell'Alfieri" numero monografico di *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, suppl. 4 (1901).
- Bettinelli, Saverio. "Discorso sopra il teatro italiano" in *Illuministi italiani. Opere di Francesco Algarotti e Saverio Bettinelli*, a cura di Ettore Bonora. Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1969.
- Bettinelli, Saverio. *Tomo sesto che contiene tragedie e poesie varie*, Zatta, Venezia 1782.
- Binni, Walter. "L'aspirazione al teatro tragico", in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, diretta da Emilio Cecchi-Natalino Sapegno, vol. 6 (Milano: Garzanti, 1968), pp. 415-426.
- Bonora, Ettore. "Le tragedie e la poetica del tragico di Saverio Bettinelli" in *Parini e altro Settecento*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1982, pp. 156-179.
- Brizzi, Gian Paolo. "Caratteri ed evoluzione del teatro di collegio italiano" in *Cattolicesimo e lumi nel Settecento italiano*, a cura di Mario Rosa. Roma: Herder, 1981, pp. 177-204.
- Carli, Gian Rinaldo. *Dell'indole del teatro tragico antico e moderno* (1747), in *Opere*. Milano: Nell'Imperiale Monastero di Sant'Ambrogio Maggiore, 1787, tomo XVII, pp. 1-191.
- Carlson, Marvin Lee. *Teorie del teatro*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996.
- Concina, Daniele. *De spectaculis theatralibus dissertationes duae*. Roma: Barbiellini, 1752.
- Concina, Daniele. *De' teatri moderni contrari alla professione cristiana libri due*. Roma: Barbiellini, 1755.
- De Angelis, V. *Critiche, traduzioni ed imitazioni del teatro di G. Racine durante il secolo XVIII*. Arpino: Fraioli, 1914.
- De Carli, Antonio. *Riflessi francesi nell'opera di Saverio Bettinelli*. Torino: Chiantore, 1928.
- Doglio, Federico. *Il teatro tragico italiano. Storia e testi*. Parma: Guanda, 1960.
- Ferrari, Luigi. *Le traduzioni italiane del teatro tragico francese nei secoli XVII e XVIII*. Parigi: Champion, 1925.
- Ferrari, Luigi. "Appunti sul teatro tragico dei Gesuiti in Italia" in *Rassegna bibliografica della letteratura italiana*, 7 (1899): 124-130.
- Ferrone, Siro e Teresa Megale, *Il teatro*, in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, diretta da Enrico Malato, vol. VI. *Il Settecento*. Roma: Salerno, 1998.
- La festa a Roma dal Rinascimento al 1870*, a cura di Marcello Fagiolo. Roma: Allemandi, 1997.
- Galletti Alfredo, *Le teorie drammatiche e la tragedia nel secolo XVIII*. Cremona: Fezzi, 1901.
- I Gesuiti e i primordi del teatro barocco in Europa*, Atti del Convegno di studi (Roma-Anagni 26-30 ottobre 1994), a cura di Maria Chiabò e Federico Doglio. Roma: La Torre d'Orfeo, 1995.
- I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*, a cura di Manfred Hinz, Roberto Righi, Danilo

- Zardin. Roma: Bulzoni, 2004.
- Granelli, Giovanni. *Seila figlia di Jefte*, Modena: Soliani, 1765.
- Granelli, Giovanni. *Manasse Re Di Giuda. Sedecia Ultimo Re Di Giuda. Dione Siracusano*, Bologna: per Girolamo Corciolani, ed Eredi Colli a S. Tommaso d'Aquino, 1751-1754.
- Herr, Mireille. *Les tragédies bibliques au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Parigi-Ginevra: Champion-Slatkine, 1988.
- Luciani, Paola. *Le passioni e gli affetti. Studi sul teatro tragico del Settecento*. Pisa: Pacini, 1999.
- Martello, Pier Jacopo. *Della tragedia antica e moderna* (1714), in *Scritti critici e satirici*, a cura di Hannibal S. Noce, Laterza, Bari 1963, pp. 187-316.
- Mattioda, Enrico. *Le teorie della tragedia nel Settecento*. Modena: Mucchi, 1994.
- Mangini, Nicola. "Il teatro tragico francese in Italia nel secolo XVIII" in *Drammaturgia e spettacolo tra Sette e Ottocento. Studi e ricerche*. Padova: Liana Editrice, 1979, pp. 1-20.
- Marotti, Ferruccio. *Lo spazio scenico. Teorie e tecniche scenografiche in Italia dall'età barocca al Settecento*. Roma: Bulzoni, 1974.
- Masiello, Vitilio. *L'ideologia tragica di Vittorio Alfieri*. Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1964.
- Meregazzi, G. *Le tragedie di Pierre Corneille nelle traduzioni e imitazioni italiane del secolo XVIII*. Bergamo: Fagnani: 1906.
- Minervini, Francesco S. "L'etica aristotelica e la progettualità gesuitica del teatro di Corneille e Bettinelli" in *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Bari*, 43 (2000), pp. 51-75.
- Muratori, Ludovico Antonio. *Della perfetta poesia italiana*, a cura di Ada Ruschioni, Marzorati, Milano 1971.
- Orfeo in Arcadia. Studi sul teatro a Roma nel Settecento*, a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1984.
- Puppo, Mario. *Il Romanticismo*. Roma: Studium, 1951.
- Ragion di Stato a Teatro*, Atti del Convegno (Foggia, Lucera, Bari 18-20 aprile 2002), a cura di Stella Castellaneta e Francesco S. Minervini. Taranto: Lisi, 2005.
- Regulae Rectoris n. 13, Ratio Studiorum et Institutiones Scholasticae Societatis Jesu*, a cura di Michel Pachtler. Tomo 2. Berlino: Hofmann, 1887.
- Sandonà, Giovan Battista. *Ragione e carità. Per un ritratto di Giambattista Roberti*. Venezia Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2002.
- Sannia Nowé, Laura. "Epifanie e metamorfosi della clemenza nella letteratura drammaturgica del Settecento" in *La cultura fra Sei e Settecento*, a cura di Elena Sala De Felice e Laura Sannia Nowé. Modena: Mucchi, 1994, pp. 171-196.
- Santato, Guido. *Tra mito e palinodia. Itinerari alfieriani*. Modena: Mucchi, 1999.
- Scaduto, Mario. "Il teatro gesuitico" in *Archivium Historicum Soc. Iesu*, 36 (1967): 194-215.
- Simioni, Attilio. *Per la storia del teatro gesuitico in Italia nel XVIII secolo*. Napoli: Jovene, 1907.

- Tiranni a teatro.* Demetrio Poliorcete e Serse re di Persia di Saverio Bettinelli, a cura di Francesco S. Minervini. Bari: Palomar, 2002.
- Varano, Alfonso. *Giovanni di Giscala*, in *Tragedie del Settecento*, a cura di Enrico Mattioda, Mucchi, Modena 1999, vol. 2, pp. 9-130
- Zanlonghi, Giovanna. *Teatri di formazione: actio, parola e immagine nella scena gesuitica del Sei-Settecento a Milano*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2002.
- Zanlonghi, Giovanna “Il teatro nella pedagogia gesuitica: una ‘scuola di virtù’” in *I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*, a cura di Manfred Hinz, Roberto Righi, Danilo Zardin. Roma: Bulzoni, 2004, pp. 159-190.



## MONA LISA'S GAZE: D'ANNUNZIO, CINEMA, AND THE 'AURA'

MICHAEL SYRIMIS

The critical studies that address the relationship between Gabriele D'Annunzio and the medium of cinema have emphasized the writer's literary influence on the popular Italian cinema of the years 1910-1919. That is not surprising, considering that D'Annunzio's direct involvement with the medium was extremely sparse. It is said that his active interest in cinema began in 1908, when he visited a film studio and experimented with the tricks made possible by the medium's specific technology (Rondolino, 215-216). His relationship with cinema, however, is customarily associated with the intertitles that he wrote for Giovanni Pastrone's monumental epic, *Cabiria* (1914), of which the extravagant mise-en-scène and pioneering use of the dolly, next to D'Annunzio's prestigious signature, are some of the things that secured the film's inclusion in the international silent cinema canon.<sup>1</sup> After *Cabiria*, D'Annunzio wrote intertitles for a few other, much less celebrated, films (Raffaelli, 46-47). He also completed three *soggetti*, only one of which was actualized as a film.<sup>2</sup> The film adaptations of D'Annunzio's novels and plays were considerably higher in number than the works that D'Annunzio wrote specifically for the screen. At least nineteen films were produced in Italy between 1911 and 1920 based on his works.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The bibliography on *Cabiria*'s importance for film history is vast. For some of the most recent work, including the stylistic analyses of footage that had been excluded from the final product, see *Cabiria e il suo tempo*, 149-232.

<sup>2</sup>Henceforth, I shall translate *soggetto* as "scenario." A *soggetto* is a story outline with occasional allusions to dialogue or style. It does not provide the detailed specification of dialogue and technique that one finds, for instance, in the standard screenplay of a Hollywood studio.

<sup>3</sup>Only one of these adaptations is extant: *La Nave* (The Ship, 1920), from his 1905 play, directed by his son, Gabriellino D'Annunzio. For an extensive list of adaptations from D'Annunzio's literature during the silent era, as well as a list of his completed and incomplete projects written specifically for cinema, see Mario Verdone (20-21). Verdone clarifies that the list is to be considered incomplete and further research would likely enrich our knowledge of D'Annunzio's activity in the field of cinema (2). Furthermore, the recent work by Ivanos Ciani doc-

Undeniably, the factor that accounts for Italian cinema's "Dannunzianism" is not the quantity of work that D'Annunzio produced specifically for the film industry, but a cultural climate permeated by his aesthetic outlook. "Dannunzianism was in the air," says Luigi Bianconi, one of the first scholars to study the relation between D'Annunzio and cinema. It was "breathed by actors and directors, scriptwriters and cameramen [...] and by the public itself" ("Arte muta", 16).<sup>4</sup> As a critical category, Dannunzianism denotes a mode of representation defined by stylistic excess, especially in the areas of acting and mise-en-scène, and by themes deriving primarily from antiquity and decadentist literature. As a critical tool, it is typically applied to the description of two of the most popular Italian film genres of the 1910s: the *film storico* (of which *Cabiria* is the quintessential example) and the *cinema in frak*. The *storico*, aspiring to revitalize the glory of ancient Rome in the face of Italy's political campaign in North Africa, shared the writer's exaltation of antiquity and the national past.<sup>5</sup> The *cinema in frak*, in its glamorous depiction of an aristocratic class living in an antiquated era barely touched by technology's radical explosion, focusing on idle characters and fatal romantic passions taking place in lavish parlours, nearby forests, and upper-class artists' ateliers, in a sense transported D'Annunzio's (or a D'Annunzio-esque) high prose into the space of mass consumption.<sup>6</sup>

However, while Dannunzianism affirms literature's ability to influence film style, it does not address other crucial aspects of that style itself, especially with respect to the technical particularities of the medium or its historical development in relation to factors other than Italian literature, such as other national cinemas. In addition, while it confirms the industry's aspirations for cultural prestige through the exploitation of nineteenth-century literature, it overlooks what I think is indispensable for any study of D'Annunzio's relation to cinema: that is, the impact that cinema itself,

---

uments D'Annunzio's negotiations with the film industry over a period of two and a half decades, shedding light on numerous potential contracts that failed to come to fruition.

<sup>4</sup>See also Bianconi's seminal essay "D'Annunzio e il cinema."

<sup>5</sup>Giovanna Finocchiaro Chimirri, for instance, discusses *Cabiria* in relation to Italy's 1911-1912 war in Libya (33). See also Gian Piero Brunetta ("La conquista," 21-23) on the relationship between *Cabiria* and D'Annunzio's nationalism.

<sup>6</sup>Among the surviving films that are exemplary of the *frak* genre are *Ma l'amor mio non muore* (Mario Caserini, 1913) and *Malombra* (Carmine Gallone, 1917). For more on Dannunzianism in Italian cinema see: Verdone (18-19); Brunetta (*Storia*, 97-103).

as a dominant cultural phenomenon, may have had on the writer's own notion of art. In this essay, I shall address the question of D'Annunzio's relation to cinema by following a route other than the one laid out by Dannunzianism. *L'uomo che rubò la "Gioconda"* (The Man Who Stole the "Gioconda," 1920), a scenario written by D'Annunzio but never actualized as a film, is nevertheless exemplary of the author's will to exercise the aesthetic techniques made possible by the medium of cinema. With very few exceptions, including a recent work by Irene Gambacorti, the scenario has received little scholarly attention, in spite of (or perhaps because of) its atypical characteristics *vis à vis* the D'Annunzio canon. In her enlightening study, Gambacorti demonstrates that D'Annunzio had a strong interest in cinema's specific aesthetic possibilities and, in line with the aspirations of the avant-garde, used cinema as a means to challenge the traditional barrier between high art and mass culture (293-315).

While I strongly share Gambacorti's views, I shall bring to the fore a new, essential dimension present within D'Annunzio's text. In writing the scenario, precisely by being inspired by cinema's technological specificity and ability to destabilize the high-low dichotomy, D'Annunzio envisioned the creation not only of a film that would entertain the movie-going public, but also of a *film-essay* that would address intellectual viewers (or readers) and, by means of an allegory, articulate a rather specific "thesis" concerning a fundamental question about the very definition of art in modernity. Masterful artworks, the scenario teaches, are distinguished by an element of "spirituality" that has its roots in the reverential function of art in religious ritual. The survival of this spiritual element is highly at stake in the face of technology's radical effects in the sphere of aesthetic production. D'Annunzio articulates the phenomenon that Walter Benjamin was to describe as the decay of the artwork's "aura" in the age of its technical reproducibility, notwithstanding the fundamental differences between the two writers' conceptual, ideological, and stylistic premises.

*L'uomo che rubò la "Gioconda"* was inspired by the 1911 theft of Leonardo's masterpiece from the Louvre.<sup>7</sup> Through trials and sacrifices, and with a determination akin to that of a scientific explorer, the "mystical Flemish painter" Peter Van Blömen, alias Orizzonte, discovers the alchem-

<sup>7</sup>A reprint of the scenario appears in the collection, *Tragedie, sogni e misteri II*. All citations of the scenario refer to this source. All translations are my own. An anonymous English translation, dating back to 1920, was discovered in D. W. Griffith's papers and is now part of the D. W. Griffith Collection at New York's Museum of Modern Art. A reprint of the translation, following an introduction by Russell Merrit, appears in a 1998 issue of *Griffithiana*.

ical principle that enables him to bring to life the human figures depicted in great paintings. For the preparation of the *cordastrum* (as Van Blömen names the invented substance), it is necessary to use the warm blood of a man's heart immediately after his death.<sup>8</sup> With the assistance of his young Italian accomplice Castruccio Lunelli, Van Blömen steals the *Gioconda* and brings it to one of her world greatest admirers, the "famous poet" Gabriele D'Annunzio now living in "exile" in Arcachon of France.<sup>9</sup> The Poet is possessed by the prospect of a flesh-and-blood encounter with Mona Lisa whom he always perceived as his ideal love. He murders Lunelli and offers his blood to the alchemist. The experiment is successful but short-lived. Soon after she is brought to life, Mona Lisa dissolves. Hoping to bring the enigmatic woman back to the now deserted landscape, Van Blömen returns to his home and applies his alchemical operations onto the canvas. During a visit by Vermeer, a man who once wilfully blinded himself for his Christian faith, Van Blömen is astonished to see that Mona Lisa indeed reappeared against her familiar background. He departs for Paris to redeliver the painting "to the world's dreams."

The scenario is as much a list of laconically described events, seeking their actualization in a visually complex film narrative, as it is a self-sufficient piece of literary text. As a screenplay, it exploits the specific properties of film technology and adheres to existing patterns of cinema narration. Needless to say, cinematic technology facilitates the representation of things unreal, as exemplified in the animation of Mona Lisa, who walks away from the canvas and then dissolves. In addition, the scenario includes elements that suggest the use of montage and camera movement, as well as an expressive use of mise-en-scène, especially in the area of lighting.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>The word *cordastrum*, possibly invented by D'Annunzio, comprises the Latin *cor* (heart, soul) and *astrum* (star, heavenly body).

<sup>9</sup>The Arcachon setting is autobiographical. In August 1911, when the *Gioconda* was stolen, D'Annunzio was in France, where he lived for five years in a form of self-exile (1910-1915) in an attempt to flee his Italian creditors. Upon his arrival, he spent several months in Paris before settling in his secluded rented residence in Arcachon (Woodhouse, 249-282). For further details on D'Annunzio's obsession with the *Gioconda* episode during his sojourn in France see Gambacorti (271-274). For clarity, I shall always refer to the character in the diegesis as "the Poet." As I shall argue, the Poet differs significantly from D'Annunzio, the author of the scenario.

<sup>10</sup>This is true, for example, in the scene of the robbery. While Van Blömen and Lunelli are hiding behind a curtain in the dark gallery, they witness "[t]he periodic passing of the patrols with the flashlights [and] [t]he light of the flashlight onto the image [of the *Gioconda*] that alone glows in the great darkness" (1181).

Nonetheless, the scenario also insists upon its status as a work of literature. That is not surprising, considering that several years before completing this work, and inspired by the theft of the *Gioconda*, D'Annunzio had begun to write *L'uomo* as a novel which, however, never reached completion (Gambacorti, 273-277). At its very opening, the scenario displays a lyrical tone, as well as the narrator's culturally and historically informed approach to the events that he is about to recount: "A mystical Flemish painter, descendant of that generation of painters who gave the court of the Popes *Standardo* [sic] and *Orizzonte*" (1173). If this statement serves as intertitles aiming to introduce the protagonist to the spectator, it certainly addresses a well-informed spectator, or at least one whose delight in the myth of Dannunzianism would compensate for the lack of comprehension, since nowhere will the narration make an explicit connection between the protagonist's actions and his cultural ancestry as presented here.<sup>11</sup> But the literary approach is mainly evident in the scenario's autonomy as a text, both in terms of its narrative closure, which does not depend on its filmic realization, and in terms of the lyricism with which it strikes the reader. "In spite of the narrative crystallization in detached scenes," states Sergio Raffaelli, "there exists a logical continuity from episode to episode that establishes a complete and autonomous fantastic universe." He observes that in the entire work only two statements constitute proper *didascalie*. They stand out because they deviate significantly from the narrative style of the fictional text (46).<sup>12</sup> In addition, Valentina Valentini describes the scenario as the "outline of a non-written novel" in the fragmentary style of

---

Gambacorti offers a detailed analysis of the scenario's cinematographic qualities (293-303).

<sup>11</sup>The opening refers to the nicknames of two Flemish brothers, both painters, who worked in Italy. Pieter Van Bloemen (1657-1729), the less renowned of the two, was named *Standardo* (banner) because of the military content in his paintings. Jan Frans Van Bloemen (1662-1749), a landscape painter, was named *Orizzonte* (horizon) because of the wide perspective in his landscapes (Busiri Vici, 18). Interestingly, in naming his protagonist, D'Annunzio draws on both painters. The character's name is Peter Van Blömen, while he also calls himself *Orizzonte* "in memory of his predecessor and because of his nostalgia for the beautiful Italy and for Rome, city of the Soul" (1173).

<sup>12</sup>As applied to early cinema, *didascalia* is the equivalent of the English *intertitles*. But it also denotes *screen direction*. Clearly, the *didascalie* that Raffaelli mentions serve as instructions for the filmmaker or anyone who would rewrite the scenario as tailored specifically to the process of filming. For example, when the *Gioconda* is brought back to the Louvre, D'Annunzio gives the following instructions, in parentheses: "(To follow the *real traces*, to follow the episode as it was told by the newspapers of the time.)" (1198).

D'Annunzio's *Notturno*.<sup>13</sup>

We may view the scenario's formal tension between a literary and a cinematic mode of representation as a symptom of D'Annunzio's hesitation to relinquish literature for a strictly instrumental use of language servicing an aesthetic project that officially lies elsewhere. But this hesitation is also part of the larger dilemma that informs the scenario's *essayistic* dimension, namely, the question of the artwork's fate in modernity.<sup>14</sup> The affinity between D'Annunzio's notion of "spirituality" and Benjamin's "aura" lies, among other things, in the inherent relation that each one has with the utilitarian function of art in religious ritual. Van Blömen's adventure with the *Gioconda* is inspired by a spiritual incident. In this Flemish city resides Gian Giuseppe Vermeer, "*the Man who lost his gaze*" (*L'Uomo che perdetto lo sguardo*) while contemplating and adoring a painting of the Virgin at the altar of the local cathedral. His eyes "see but do not look" (*vedono ma non guardano*), specifies the narrator, obviously to distinguish the sense of vision from intellectual and inquisitive observation, the renunciation of which is a distinct mark of the eminently pious. Since that day, the canvas "bears within itself something richer, brighter, more pathetic." A passage that strikes us more as a philosophical reflection for its own sake than as a scene in a film links the event to a universal phenomenon:

The spirituality that accumulates around the great works of art, around the great human masterpieces.

The thoughts, feelings, imaginations, dreams provoked by famous paintings, famous statues.

The great mass of human emanations that weighs on the glorious images and expands endlessly their might and beauty.

Gian Giuseppe Vermeer has not only left his gaze but the best part of his soul and life on that altar painting.

Has he not *transubstantiated* himself in the divine figure? (1173-1174)

At first glance, rather than being an inherent quality of the artwork, the

---

<sup>13</sup>Valentini insists, however, that the style bears an inherent affinity with screenwriting proper. The scenario's literary dissolution of traditional syntax is legitimized, according to Valentini, by its transitional status as preliminary to the shooting of a film. She also notes that the scene of the robbery resembles a detective story (*un racconto poliziesco*) where the "febrile rhythm of the fast action is congenial to the 'screenplay form'" (15-16).

<sup>14</sup>Valentini also notes that the text often presents "interrogative sentences, cues submitted to the reader towards a reflection [...], that contribute to ascribe to the text the state and tone of the page of a diary, a conversation of the author with himself [...]" (15).

supernatural semblance involves the projection of a human experience onto the object. As regards the religious painting in particular, its utilitarian appropriation for ritual may very well be arbitrary. The faith projected on it will overshadow the arbitrariness. This projection is expressed in the metaphor of "transubstantiation." The lost "gaze" of the faithful does not simply disappear but is retraceable in the image of the Virgin. In man's possession, the will for knowledge becomes the primary cause of secular progress. In the case of the genuinely humble, however, it is willingly and totally surrendered. Such is the case of Vermeer, a man of "blind" faith, in whose eyes the Virgin appears to be alive. Having fully absorbed his soul, his will for knowledge, his critical consciousness, She gives him the impression of gazing back as omniscient.

The passage tidily separates secular categories from religious ones—thoughts, feelings, imaginations, dreams, or soul, transubstantiation—at the same time that it unites them under the indistinct notion of the "human emanations" that weigh upon the images. Immediately following the telling of Vermeer's experience, this flexibility allows for a smooth shift of emphasis towards secular art:

There is in the world a work of art, almost magical, that for centuries fascinated the imagination of the poets. Generations of contemplators and dreamers created around it a spiritual atmosphere of an incalculable intensity.

It is the *Gioconda* by Vinci. (1174)

Thus the *Gioconda*, like the Virgin, is enshrouded by her own "spiritual" halo. In this case, however, the halo is stored up by the contemplation not of the eminently humble but of "dreamers," whom Van Blömen will see at the Louvre in a circle of "ecstatic" men, who are fully absorbed in what the narrator now distinguishes as the painting's "secular enigma" (1179). By juxtaposing the religious with the secular, D'Annunzio implies that the "spirituality" of secular art is a result of reverential treatment that is carried over from the function of art in religious ritual.

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), Benjamin will also recognize the "basis" of the aura in ritual. Unlike D'Annunzio, however, in whose narrative the two phenomena occur synchronically, he emphasizes the historical shift from ritual proper to "secularized ritual": "The secular cult of beauty, developed during the Renaissance [...], clearly showed that ritualistic basis in its decline" (223-224).<sup>15</sup> He explains this change in terms of a "displacement":

<sup>15</sup>This statement is directly preceded by the following comments: "We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then

The uniqueness of the phenomena which hold sway in the cult image is more and more displaced by the empirical uniqueness of the creator or of his creative achievement. To be sure, never completely so; the concept of authenticity always transcends mere genuineness. [...] With the secularization of art, authenticity displaces the cult value of the work. (244)

He has already defined “authenticity,” an essential part of the aura, as a secular condition. Beyond mere genuineness, it involves the substantive duration of the object and its resulting testimony to the history that it has experienced (221). Without a doubt, “authenticity” as a product of historical testimony is part of D’Annunzio’s description of the *Gioconda*, and not only because of its centuries-long veneration in a museum: in anticipation of the alchemist’s miracle, the Poet thinks enviously of “Bonaparte [...], who had Leonardo’s painting *in his bedroom* at Fontainebleau” (1189). Furthermore, the synchronicity of the two “rituals” in D’Annunzio does not negate the existence of a “displacement,” insofar as that is a social or psychological phenomenon as well as a historical one. That is to say, the adoration of art on the part of the aesthete or non-believer is like a religion which does not, however, eradicate from history the cult function of art in ritual proper. The text implies that what occurs in the case of the *Gioconda* is itself a form of “transubstantiation,” another projection of human experience onto the painting—if not of religious faith, of the “thoughts, feelings, imaginations, dreams” invested by “generations of contemplators and dreamers”—as a result of which, in the eyes of its “dreamers,” Mona Lisa appears to be gazing back.

The concept of the reciprocal gaze, which Benjamin presents in his essay on Baudelaire, is fundamental in the definition of the aura as experienced in natural objects. An essential characteristic of common human interactions, it refers to the anticipation that “the person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return.” The projection of this human response onto our encounter with inanimate objects accounts for their aura: “To experience the aura of a phenomenon means to invest it with the capability of returning the gaze. This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*.” Upon actualization of the experience, the rec-

---

the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.”

iprociating gaze is accompanied by the object's "unique appearance of a distance." This "distance" has nothing to do with the object's degree of spatial proximity in relation to the subject. Instead, it is understood in relation to Freud's notion of the "uncanny."<sup>16</sup> It refers to a *temporal* distance, an unconscious past invoked by the encountered object, which instantaneously grabs the subject by way of *mémoire involontaire*, as the latter is explained in Proust.<sup>17</sup> The experience of the aura "is neither immediate nor 'natural,'" explains Miriam Hansen, but "involves a sudden moment of transference" while "the gaze that nature appears to be returning [...] confronts us with another self, never before seen in a waking state" (188).

Benjamin alludes to the psychoanalytic basis of the phenomenon also in his comments on art. Like objects in nature, art has the capability of realizing an uncanny experience for the subject. When that occurs, it is perceived as beautiful. Drawing on Valéry, he defines our perception of the beautiful as something that infinitely regenerates itself: "The painting we look at reflects back at us that of which our eyes will never have their fill. What it contains that fulfills the original desire would be the very same stuff on which the desire continuously feeds."<sup>18</sup> From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, the "stuff" refers to the trace of a pre-oedipal memory, whose vague invocation exhilarates because of its suggestiveness, while its immateriality sustains the desire: "What prevents our delight in the beautiful from ever being satisfied is the image of the past." Art reproduces beauty when, upon

<sup>16</sup> Freud defines the uncanny by observing human encounters with things that are perceived as frightening: "[A]mong instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny; and it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some *other* affect. [...] [T]his uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" ("The Uncanny," 241).

<sup>17</sup> For the above remarks on the aura I rely on Miram Hansen's essay on Benjamin (186-188). The quotations are from Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939) and are presented here as translated by Hansen (cf. *Illuminations*, 188).

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin also distinguishes the painting from the photograph, whose technical reproducibility he considers exemplary of modernity's demolition of the aura: "[T]o the eyes that will never have their fill of a painting, photography is rather like food for the hungry or drink for the thirsty" (187). As I shall argue, in an analogous manner, Mona Lisa's aura is abolished at the moment Van Blömen succeeds in "animating" her figure through alchemy—a practice that I shall interpret as a metaphor of film technology.

its sight, the subject detects a familiar yet indefinable trace: “Insofar as art aims at the beautiful and, on however modest a scale, ‘reproduces’ it, it conjures it up (as Faust does Helen) out of the womb of time” (187).<sup>19</sup>

The capability of awakening a primordial past is also a characteristic of the *Gioconda*—not because Freud interpreted the enigmatic smile as Leonardo’s unconscious search for the smile of his mother (from whom he had indeed been separated at a very early age) but because D’Annunzio’s scenario itself points to that direction from the start (Freud, “Leonardo,” 107–118). Van Blömen begins to experiment with alchemy and painting only to bring back the life of a lost “perfect love” (1173). More importantly, the “beautiful,” in the sense of self-regenerating, is very much a characteristic of the *Gioconda*, whose “spirituality,” upon her admirers’ contemplation, “continuously renews itself” (1179). Furthermore, in speaking of the ecstatic admirers’ enchantment by the female figure, the narrator emphasizes their status as her “lonesome lovers” (*amanti solitarii*, 1179). This lonesomeness is a result of relinquishing human relations in the search for an ideal. It forewarns the fate of the Poet who, known to be “one of the keenest lovers of the *Gioconda*” (1180), will forever lose Sonia, his lover in flesh and blood, as a consequence of preparing the ritual of Mona Lisa’s animation.

After Van Blömen and Lunelli arrive in Arcachon, the Poet conceals from Sonia his possession of the painting. Noticing the secrecy surrounding the arrival of the two strangers, Sonia is overcome by jealousy, as she intuitively perceives that the situation concerns a “‘feminine’ secret” (1188). To satisfy her curiosity, in a femme-fatale style that evokes her Dannunzian predecessors, she seduces Lunelli who consequently falls madly in love with her.<sup>20</sup> They meet in the nearby forest during a fire, pictured in a spectacular sequence that leads to their death. Lunelli becomes the victim of the Poet’s dagger in a duel inspired by jealousy. Horrified upon witnessing the extracting of Lunelli’s heart for the preparation of the *cordastrum*, Sonia mounts her horse and rushes into the rapidly advancing

---

<sup>19</sup>The reference to Faust is significant. The underworld is a register of both past and present. Like the unconscious, where past memories still survive as repressed, it is the place where Helen, who once lived, still lives as dead. Her return is a vision of “beauty.” It stirs up the longing for a past world that is otherwise known as beyond one’s grasp.

<sup>20</sup>“Sonia, inebriated of imagination, mad of perverse curiosity, vindictive and cruel, gave a rendezvous to the young Italian in the blazing forest. She pushed him, with wise provocations, to the most desperate madness of love and desire” (1190). Sonia is also described as a “very beautiful beast” (*bellissima belva*) and

flames. Her death provokes no immediate emotional reaction on the Poet's part. Only later, while speaking to Mona Lisa during her brief animation, does the Poet mention Sonia for the first time. That is less, however, an expression of longing for Sonia herself than a part of the Poet's love confession to Mona Lisa. His words imply that Sonia's death was necessary for the attainment of another love that is perceived as ideal: "I killed my love for you: my last love, for you who are my only and true love. [...] I gave everything to the fire [...] because you had been promised to me" (1195-1196). Any consummated love affair is a compromise, a substitute for a lost primordial love: "I looked for you in all my lovers. I looked for your smile on all those voluptuous lips" (1196).<sup>21</sup>

The unsettling tone of this love confession expresses the Poet's disappointment, in seeing that once Mona Lisa is animated she bears the gaze of a mere stranger: "No communion. The centuries stand between him and her. [...] She no longer has the mysterious smile that Leonardo drew with music from that mediocre and unaware soul" (1195). What she loses is her "spirituality," or her "aura." The dialectic of distance and closeness, which is essential in the experience of the aura, also defines the Poet's perception of Leonardo's painting. This is confirmed at the moment the aura is lost, when the Poet becomes suddenly aware of the centuries that separate them and when he experiences the distance which emanates from her now alienated gaze, not as auratic but as absolute and impenetrable:

You are alive and breathe. You are alive and speak.  
 Or were you more alive when you weren't breathing, when you weren't speaking?  
 Or were you closer to me when you had behind your shoulders the inaccessible rocks and the tortuous waters? (1196)

The distance that now marks her gaze, bearing no familiar trace, is com-

---

as the "enemy" (*nemica*) (1187). By putting the latter in quotation marks, D'Annunzio makes an intentional reference to his own literature. "Nemica" appears in *Trionfo della morte* (Triumph of Death, 1894) to characterize the heroine Ippolita Sanzio. Seductive and irresistible, yet made of "ill, weak and lecherous flesh," only when she dies will Giorgio Aurispa be freed from her "empire" (850).

<sup>21</sup>The search for an ideal through art at the cost of sacrificing one's lover in flesh-and-blood is also the central theme in Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842). Amazed by the life-likeness of a female portrait, the protagonist traces the painting's history. A painter's total devotion to the making of his lover's portrait allowed him to overlook the physical suffering of the lover herself. When she died, the life that had escaped her body was retraceable in the painting (235-238).

parable to the stare of the eyes described by Baudelaire, in those verses that Benjamin reads as an expression of the demolition of the aura. Those eyes do not return the gaze but instead “look at us with a mirror-like blankness.” Thus they “know nothing of distance,” insofar as “distance” encompasses what is seemingly its opposite, that is, something familiar, a deep-rooted closeness (Benjamin, 189-190). To be sure, the enigmatic smile, which the alchemist unwittingly eradicates, is not exclusive to the figure of Mona Lisa, but is D’Annunzio’s equivalent of the “aura” in art. Its meaning reaches beyond its literal association with a person’s facial composure: “In the figure-less painting the divine rocky landscape remains, where the tortuous water seems to divinely perpetuate the human smile” (1194). That the artwork’s ability to grab the subject is not tied to the depiction of female beauty is reconfirmed when Mona Lisa disappears. Van Blömen and the Poet turn to the painting to see whether she resumed her original post: “No. She did not return. The background is deserted. But the town of rocks and water *smiles* like Mona Lisa” (1197).

Benjamin finds a definition of the aura in Proust. He quotes a statement whose affinity with D’Annunzio’s comments on “spirituality” is unmistakable:

“Some people who are fond of secrets flatter themselves that *objects retain something of the gaze* that has rested on them.” (The ability, it would seem, of returning the gaze.) “They believe that monuments and pictures present themselves only beneath the *delicate veil which centuries of love and reverence* on the part of so many admirers *have woven* about them.”  
(Benjamin, 188; emphasis added)

The idea that the admirers’ gaze accumulates around the artwork leads to a different concept of the aura than what is suggested by its definition in terms of a projection or transference. While the latter concerns the momentary invocation of a past that resides permanently within the subject, the former implies that the aura resides upon the object itself, that it is stored up over time. Like Proust’s “veil,” D’Annunzio’s “spirituality” is the residue of the gaze that “accumulates around the great works of art,” an “atmosphere” that “generations of contemplators and dreamers created around” the *Gioconda* (1173-1174). Proust’s narrator, however, views those “people who are fond of secrets” with critical distance: “This chimera [...] would change into truth if they related it to the only reality that is valid for the individual, namely, the world of his emotions.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the passage

---

<sup>22</sup>The passage that Benjamin quotes is from Proust’s *Le temps retrouvé*. The original reads: “Certains esprits qui aiment le mystère veulent croire que les objets

on “spirituality” ostensibly represents the reflections not of the author, but of a fictional character. It immediately follows Van Blömen’s “conversations with the Man without a gaze,” carried by Van Blömen only because he is “attracted by this mystery” (1173). From the alchemist’s metaphysical perspective, “transubstantiation” (which I have thus far interpreted as a metaphor) is literal: “Has he not *transubstantiated* himself in the divine figure?” (1174). This rhetorical question favours the empirical verifiability of transubstantiation and posits Vermeer’s testimony as proof.

D’Annunzio’s text, however, establishes a particularly ambivalent position as regards the permanence of “spirituality” in the artwork. For one thing, the narrator’s separation from the characters is not always evident. The scenario oscillates between the objective remarks of an omniscient narrator and those that may or may not express the characters’ thoughts. The interrogative sentence mentioned above, for instance, is not explicitly attributed to the mystic. Arguably, the writer uses this ambiguity in order to mimic, with irony, the characters’ sensibility. At the same time, however, he does not definitively mock the idea that a mystical element resides in art. It is important that Mona Lisa’s reappearance occurs in the presence of Vermeer, who now is not only “without a gaze” but literally blind. Fascinated by the mystery surrounding Vermeer’s lost “gaze,” Van Blömen steals the painting of the Virgin from the altar. His goal is to make the spiritual substance “precipitate” and apply it towards the recovery of the man’s “gaze.” Vermeer, however, is sharply opposed to this prospect. He rejoices in having donated something so valuable to the “Woman of Heaven.” “No. You will not commit this sacrilege,” he says to Van Blömen. The zealous alchemist, nonetheless, carries out his own plan. Vermeer instantly notices a change in the image: “The splendor has diminished.” He also recognizes his own image in a mirror. He realizes that his “gaze” has been restored and “the votive offering made to the divine creature” has been annulled. To compensate for the “sacrilege,” he grabs a knife and repeats “the desperate act of Oedipus” (1175-1176).

Whether Vermeer’s “gaze” stands for empirical observation or the probing into one’s repressed past, the knowledge that it bestows is of a secular kind. Vermeer blinds himself because, momentarily, he is confronted

---

conservent quelque chose des yeux qui les regardèrent, que les monuments et les tableaux ne nous apparaissent que sous le voile sensible que leur ont tissé l’amour et la contemplation de tant d’adorateurs, pendant des siècles. Cette chimère deviendrait vraie s’ils la transposaient dans le domaine de la seule réalité pour chacun, dans le domaine de sa propre sensibilité” (Proust, 884). Benjamin, who agrees with Proust’s conclusion (although he calls it “evasive”), further elaborates on it, drawing on Valéry and Baudelaire (188).

by his own capability of seeing truth with a secular eye. His self-sacrifice transforms him into a vessel of pure “spirituality.” It is his mere presence, apparently, that brings Leonardo’s Mona Lisa back to her mysterious landscape. Perhaps, D’Annunzio allows us to speculate, what makes a secular artwork a masterpiece is that it is *not completely* secular. The painting of the Virgin (*any* painting of the Virgin) absorbs the soul of the pious only by virtue of its religious function, regardless of its artistic qualities. But can any secular painting be arbitrarily deemed a masterpiece? What is it that makes it “almost magical” and worthy of adoration? Perhaps something divine dwells therein, whose essence evades the intellect, and for which reason D’Annunzio selects “spirituality” as its name.

Despite the autobiographical allusions, the Poet alone does not represent the author’s viewpoint. The scenario’s thesis on art encompasses the different attitudes exhibited by the characters of the Poet, Vermeer, and Van Blömen. In the Poet, D’Annunzio rehearses his own popular image as an aesthete, which he contrasts with the figure of Vermeer. Though in different ways, the reference to Oedipus describes both characters. Vermeer’s voluntary blindness is a reaction against the trauma of knowledge. It makes him a model of Christian faith, but also of repression. The Poet, on the other hand, wishes to possess the enigmatic woman in flesh and blood. What attracts him to Mona Lisa is her “aura,” her uncanny quality, that element of hers that is familiar yet alienated through repression.<sup>23</sup> This familiar trace arouses in the Poet a pre-Oedipal wish, namely, the wish to return to a state of complete un-repression. Hence, differently from Vermeer, the Poet would like to be an Oedipus whose eyes would remain intact. That is, he would like to have his cake and eat it too.<sup>24</sup> Overall, while Vermeer’s reli-

---

<sup>23</sup>See Freud, “The Uncanny,” 241. The Poet’s desire for Mona Lisa also recalls those encounters that, according to Freud, evoke the mother’s body and thus involve a play of the unfamiliar and the familiar: “It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that ‘Love is home-sickness’; [...] [T]he *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix ‘*un*’ [‘un-’] is the token of repression” (“The Uncanny,” 245; the brackets are included in the cited source).

<sup>24</sup>Needless to say, any fulfillment of the wish is by necessity imaginary, a fantasy, the transience of which is confirmed by the brevity of Mona Lisa’s rebirth. The “distance” is not really overcome, Mona Lisa is elsewhere, the landscape, which still “smiles,” retains its physiognomic quality, and thus the desire is sustained.

giosity affirms that art is sacred, the Poet's aestheticism draws a "secular enigma." The juxtaposition of the two attitudes, whether contesting or complementing each other, proposes a complex characterization of traditional art. But the anachronism of an alchemist in 1911 presents a case about the re-definition of art in the era of modern technology.<sup>25</sup>

As an alchemist, Van Blömen needs to reconcile his metaphysical outlook with his experiential one. Not only does he believe in transubstantiation, he also advocates its practical use: "With which art can one recognize, sever, isolate, restore these accumulated elements?" (1174). Once he succeeds in restoring Vermeer's "gaze," he develops a higher ambition: "The spiritual substance may be alchemized, it may be converted into perceptible apparitions" (1177). He invents the *cordastrum* and is ready to steal the *Gioconda*. His goal of making the intangible tangible, along with his refusal to please Vermeer upon whom he imposes a secular view of the world, indicates that his drive for empirical experimentation surpasses his reverence of the mystical. As in the case of the Virgin, his experiment with the *Gioconda* produces a woman without a "smile." But let us remember that Van Blömen is above all a painter. His alchemical ventures, anachronistically set in 1911, refer allegorically to his role as an artist. He represents a time of ambivalence as regards the very notion of art: between an object of reverence and a phenomenon whose negotiation with modern technology threatens its aura. Evidently, without Vermeer's presence, Van Blömen's devices fail to recover Mona Lisa. By this day, his sense of "spirituality" is diminished.

In spite of the qualities that "spirituality" and "aura" share, the weakening of the phenomenon as represented in the allegory of the "fallen" alchemist is different from Benjamin's analogous idea in "The Work of Art."<sup>26</sup> In this essay, "the decay of the aura" bears a vast social significance. It rests on "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly," to overcome "the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction" (222-223).<sup>27</sup> Van Blömen's attempt to animate

---

<sup>25</sup>Generally speaking, alchemy was outmoded by chemistry in the eighteenth century (Read, v). For a more extensive discussion of this historical transition see Taylor, 190-212.

<sup>26</sup>If we view Van Blömen's loss of spirituality in light of alchemy's transformation into chemistry, we may speak of his "fall": "From the alchemist's point of view, chemistry represented a 'Fall' because it meant the secularization of a sacred science" (Eliade, 11).

<sup>27</sup>Benjamin's essay on "The Work of Art" seems to present a resolute apology for the *decay* of the aura, while his view of the aura is neutral in the essay on Baude-

Mona Lisa for the Poet's pleasure obviously has little to do with the masses' radical takeover of culture. The Poet, who bears traits of the Dannunzian aesthete and Superman, is neither troubled by the reverential quality of the masterpiece nor excluded from the institution of high art. On the contrary, he is enchanted by those very things that account for the painting's "aura"—its authenticity, uniqueness, permanence, and inapproachability—while he considers himself entitled to the rare privilege of having unlimited access to the masterpiece. Furthermore, with respect to technique, the decay of Mona Lisa's "spirituality" is an effect not of technical reproduction but of the alchemist's ability to transform the intangible (the sacred, or the enigmatic) into tangible.

However, if the transition from Leonardo's painting to Van Blömen's "dull" Mona Lisa bears an allegorical function, the allegory points to a juxtaposition that occurs outside the diegesis: between Leonardo's painting and D'Annunzio's screenplay. As in the case of reproduction that entails the technological nature of the medium, it is D'Annunzio's consideration of cinema's technical specificity that warrants the literal depiction of the alchemist's achievement. Mona Lisa's animation consists of a display of cinematic tricks:

The prodigy.

The animation of the image.

The alive figure detaches herself from the painting.

She exits entirely. (1194)

Hence compared to the Poet, the painter/alchemist, whose reverence for the mystical is in crisis, is a more accurate representative of D'Annunzio himself—the lover of sublime art, yet the real-life inventor of a "dull" Mona Lisa. Moreover, should this invention aspire to upset the social function of the traditional artwork as an object of reverence, it is only through the process of mechanical reproduction (insofar as the scenario is written with a film in mind) that its ideological repercussions would be actualized

---

laire. Both essays speak of a "unique phenomenon of a distance," historically based on the cult function of art: "The essentially distant is the inapproachable: inapproachability is in fact a primary quality of the ceremonial image" ("The Work of Art," 243 n.; "Baudelaire," 188). Yet the Baudelaire essay emphasizes the notion of the aura as the return of the gaze, alluding to the psychoanalytic dimension of "distance." For an extensive commentary on the redemption of the aura, indicating that its indispensable role in aesthetic experience is already implicit in "The Work of Art" (in Benjamin's notion of the "optical unconscious"), see Hansen, 202-224.

in the sphere of reception.

Does the scenario indeed question the status of the artwork as an object of reverence?<sup>28</sup> What distinctly characterizes the scene of the "dull" *Mona Lisa* is the conspicuous manner in which it advocates, through cinematic tricks, not merely the *adaptation* of an artwork originating in another medium (which was common in cinema) but the visual *modification*, in a literal sense, of an already visual work. It thus constitutes an intervention whose outcome is a candid distortion of the original. Furthermore, one does not fail to perceive the humour with which D'Annunzio conceived this distortion. Once we try to imagine *Mona Lisa's* animation through film, we think of the technical factors that come into play. Such is the question of acting. Which one of the Italian divas will play *Mona Lisa*? Will she appear with no visible make up (or eyebrows) in order to reproduce her ethereal beauty? Will she be instructed to suspend the diva's usual histrionic gestures to convey the sobriety that marks the Florentine lady? Or will she retain make-up, gestures, and all the rest, in order to draw out the enigmatic lady's "fatale" side (adhering, of course, to the period's cinematic conventions of the femme-fatale style)?<sup>29</sup>

With its irony, the scenario participates in what was to become a "tradition" of *Gioconda* send-ups, still at an early stage in 1920. Its earliest known example is Sapeck's drawing of *Mona Lisa with a Pipe* (1887), while its most famous one from this early period is probably Marcel Duchamp's provocative *L.H.O.O.Q* (1919) (Gambacorti, 312).<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the animated *Mona Lisa* is very much in line with the radical experiments pro-

<sup>28</sup>For D'Annunzio's desecration of the *Gioconda* see also Gambacorti, 311-315.

<sup>29</sup>Relying in part on Mario Praz's seminal study of the femme fatale in literature, Donald Sassoon argues that it was not until the nineteenth-century, when the femme fatale became a standard type comprising the traits of beautiful, seductive, and castrating, that the image of *Mona Lisa* underwent a "transmutation [...] from a cheerful housewife into a mysterious, ironic woman" (92, 93-117).

<sup>30</sup>This constitutes one of Duchamp's "ready-mades," his radical challenge of the institution of high art: ordinary objects of no aesthetic worth by traditional standards, sometimes slightly modified by the artist, displayed in a context that endows them with artistic status. On a postcard of the *Gioconda*, Duchamp drew a moustache and a beard, adding underneath the image the infamous *L.H.O.O.Q*. When it is read uninterruptedly in French, this series of letters produces the phrase *elle a chaud au cul* (she is hot in the butt). For more on this work in the context of Duchamp's avant-gardism, see Seigel, 115-147. Another famous *Gioconda* send-up preceding D'Annunzio's work is Kasimir Malevich's *Composition with Mona Lisa* (1914), a collage in which the *Mona Lisa* image is almost hidden by the other elements while her face and neck are each marked

posed by Marinetti and the futurists in their 1916 manifesto on film: specifically, filmic transcriptions of *passéiste* poetry that faithfully turn metaphors into images, thus rendering them literal. The “irreverent” result, for the amusement of modernity’s ardent public, is the complete ridicule of the poem. Such would be, for instance, the transcription of Carducci’s “my heart fled over the Tyrrhenian Sea,” depicting the poet’s heart that “pops out of his jacket and flies like a huge red balloon over the Gulf of Rapallo” (142-143). Likewise, to animate Mona Lisa means to render literal the “enigma,” the live gaze, the chimera sustained by generations of “dreamers”; and in the footsteps of Marinetti, to distract the contemporary spectator, whose adoration of high art, or his exclusion from it, shall yield to freshly articulated aesthetic and cultural horizons.<sup>31</sup>

Surely, this “irreverent” treatment throws further light on the question of “spirituality.” It indicates a tongue-in-cheek attitude, rather than a sincere conviction, on the author’s part when he speaks of art as sacred or enigmatic. This, however, does not definitively negate the ample space and thematic gravity granted the stories of Vermeer and the Poet, and thus their personal encounters (sacred or secular) with the artwork. The mockery—which contests, rather than rejects, tradition—produces an overall irresolute position regarding the question of art’s role in society. In closing with

---

with a red cross. For more on the *Gioconda* send-ups, including other famous and more recent examples, see Sassoon, 207-214. Molly Nesbit also discusses the transformation of the Mona Lisa image into an icon of mass and consumer culture, especially after her theft in 1911.

<sup>31</sup>The “irreverence” towards tradition is also found in the casual use of personal names that bear cultural significance. Orizzonte (see note 11) was a younger contemporary of the Dutch painter Vermeer (1632-1675). A secondary character, the young Antonio Van Diemen, who willingly dies in order to donate his heart to Van Blömen for the invention of the *cordastrum*, is named after a Dutch colonialist in the East Indies (1593-1645). It is unlikely that we may draw any consistent metaphors or allegories based on these names. But some observations may be made regarding the choice of a “Flemish city” as the place where the *Gioconda* theft is planned. In creating a Flemish protagonist who is both a painter and an alchemist, D’Annunzio may have been inspired by the many Flemish and Dutch painters known for their depictions of alchemy (Read, 63-84). Furthermore, following the *Gioconda*’s theft in 1911, the main suspect was the starving artist Géry Piéret, friend of Apollinaire and Picasso, and apparently of Belgian origin, who had previously stolen two statuettes from the Louvre (Nesbit, 10). Obsessed with the *Gioconda* and the tales about her theft, D’Annunzio invented his own tale, telling his French translator, André Doderet, that he had received the stolen *Gioconda* (Sassoon, 196).

the recovery of the *Gioconda*, D'Annunzio restates his respect and love for the Renaissance masterpiece. Yet, he does so only after having declared his separation from it, the scenario's distinctiveness as a non-traditional work of art. After all, he reminds us that Leonardo's *Gioconda* is shut inside the Louvre, while his own "Gioconda," potentially a film, shall meet us in numerous other spaces.

*Washington University  
St. Louis, Missouri*

#### *Works cited*

- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Bianconi, Luigi. "Arte muta' e letteratura: Il verismo e il dannunzianesimo." *Bianco e nero* 6.2 (1942): 3-17.
- . "D'Annunzio e il cinema." *Bianco e nero* 3.11 (1939): 3-57.
- Brunetta, Gian Piero. "La conquista dell'impero dei sogni: D'Annunzio e Pirandello." *Film and Literature*, ed. John P. Welle. Spec. issue of *Annali d'italianistica* 6 (1988): 18-37.
- . *Storia del cinema italiano I: Il cinema muto 1895-1929*. Rome: Riuniti, 1993.
- Busiri Vici, Andrea. *Jan Frans Van Bloemen Orizzonte e l'origine del paesaggio romano settecentesco*. Rome: Ugo Bozzi, 1974.
- Cabiria*. Dir. Giovanni Pastrone. Perf. Italia Almirante Manzini, Bartolomeo Pagano et al. Itala Film, 1914.
- Cabiria e il suo tempo*, eds. Paolo Bertetto and Gianni Rondolino. Milan: Editrice Il Castoro, 1998.
- Ciani, Ivanos. *Fotogrammi dannunziani: Materiali per la storia del rapporto D'Annunzio – Cinema*. Pescara: Ediars, 1999.
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. *The Man Who Stole the Gioconda*. 1920. *Griffithiana* 21.64 (1998): 60-79.
- . *Trionfo della morte* (1894), pp. 637-1018 in *Prose di romanzi I*, ed. Annamaria Andreoli. Milan: Mondadori, 1996.
- . *L'uomo che rubò la Gioconda* (1920), pp. 1171-1199 in *Tragedie, sogni e miserie II*, ed. Egidio Bianchetti. Verona: Mondadori, 1966.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Forge and the Crucible*, trans. Stephen Corrin. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962.
- Finocchiaro Chimirri, Giovanna. *D'Annunzio e il cinema: Cabiria*. Catania: C.U.E.C.M., 1986.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood" (1910), pp. 57-137 in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey. Vol. 11. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.
- . "The Uncanny" (1919), pp. 217-256 in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey. Vol. 17. London: Hogarth Press, 1955.

- Gambacorti, Irene. *Storie di cinema e letteratura: Verga, Gozzano, D'Annunzio*. Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2003.
- Hansen, Miriam. "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology.'" *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 179-224.
- Ma l'amor mio non muore*. Dir. Mario Caserini. Perf. Lyda Borelli et al. Gloria, 1913.
- Malombra*. Dir. Carmine Gallone. Perf. Lyda Borelli et al. Cines, 1917.
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso, et al. *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano De Maria. 3rd ed. Milan: Mondadori, 1996.
- Merrit, Russell. "The Man Who Stole the 'Gioconda': Introduction." *Griffithiana* 21.64 (1998): 50-59.
- Nesbit, Molly. "The Rat's Ass." *October* 56 (1990): 7-20.
- Proust, Marcel. *Le temps retrouvé* (1927), pp. 689-1048 in *A la recherche du temps perdu III*, ed. Pierre Clarac and André Ferré. Bruges: Librairie Gallimard, 1954.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *Selected Tales: With an Introduction by Kenneth Graham*, ed. Douglas Grant. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Raffaelli, Sergio. "Il D'Annunzio prosatore nelle didascalie dei suoi film." *Quaderni del Vittoriale* 4 (1977): 45-53.
- Read, John. *The Alchemist in Life, Literature and Art*. New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1947.
- Rondolino, Gianni. "Gli impacchi taumaturgici dei miti di celluloido" pp. 213-228 in *Gabriele D'Annunzio: grandezza e delirio nell'industria dello spettacolo; Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Torino, 21-23 marzo 1988*. Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1989.
- Sassoon, Donald. *Becoming Mona Lisa: The Making of a Global Icon*. New York: Harcourt, 2001.
- Seigel, Jerold. *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995.
- Taylor, F. Sherwood. *The Alchemists: Founders of Modern Chemistry*. New York: Henry Schuman, 1949.
- Valentini, Valentina. *Un fanciullo delicato e forte: Il cinema di Gabriele D'Annunzio*. Rome: Biblioteca del Vascello, 1995.
- Verdone, Mario. "Gabriele D'Annunzio nel cinema italiano." *Bianco e nero* 7-8 (1963): 1-21.
- Woodhouse, John. *Gabriele D'Annunzio: Defiant Archangel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

## REMEMBERING D'ANNUNZIO AND *IL DUCE*: MODERN PROPHECY IN ITALY

TIMOTHY C. CAMPBELL

What is the relation among the dead, their prophets, and genealogies of Italian fascism? The question presents itself most forcefully in the works of Gabriele D'Annunzio, particularly his 1921 convalescent narrative, *Notturno*. There D'Annunzio, immobilized and temporally blind after a bi-plane crash during the First World War, imagines himself as an embalmed Egyptian scribe who inhabits the world of both the living and the dead. Such an interest on his part in the art of body preservation will come as little surprise to any reader of D'Annunzio or any visitor to the Vittoriale: its built structure resembles nothing so much as a tomb-in-waiting. That D'Annunzio employs a similar rhetoric in *Notturno* would have been nothing new for a poet so obsessed with investigating the border between life and death.<sup>1</sup> Of course fascism, too, had its cult of the dead. With its worship of the supreme gesture and its obsessive interest in cemeteries and their entombed heroes, Italian fascism traffics in a rhetoric of sacrifice and death; its heroes immortalized in elaborate rituals and their burial often joined to a public spectacle linking their death to the fortunes of fascism.<sup>2</sup> Despite the energy with which the state memorialized its heroes, the regime never seriously considered embalming as a memorial practice: the costs were prohibitive and, what's more, only one individual merited eternal remembrance.

That person was, of course, Mussolini, who most certainly would have been memorialized appropriately after his death considering the success with which he was monumentalized during his life. As Sergio Luzzatto describes it, fascism accepted a strict corporal imperative vis-à-vis *il Duce*:

Al pari di altri sistemi totalitari del Novecento, il fascismo ha variamente elaborato il sogno di garantire al corpo carismatico la durabilità dell'istituzione ch'egli incarnava e in qualche modo esauriva: la durabilità di un monumento, cioè di un oggetto inanimato, indistinguibile per natura da un corpo imbalsamato (Luzzatto 24).

<sup>1</sup>See for example Spackman, Mazza 11-22 and Gibellini 198-213.

<sup>2</sup>See for example Valli and Gentile, *Il littorio* 57-92.

[Much like other totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, fascism elaborated in a variety of ways the dream of guaranteeing to [Mussolini's] charismatic body the durability of the institution that he both embodied and in some ways exhausted. It was the durability of a monument, that is, of an inanimate object, indistinguishable in its nature from an embalmed body.]

As suggestive as Luzzatto's analysis of institutional commemoration is, he leaves unexamined the connections that run between a semantics of remembrance and genealogies of fascism, of which the D'Annunzian strand stands out: those pages of *Notturno* devoted not only to the dismembered bodies of fallen comrades, but also to the attempts to re-member D'Annunzio's own body with the assistance of the dead. In this sense *Notturno* circumscribes a new symbolic politics in which the dead not only sanction the re-membering of the crowd and of *il Comandante*, as D'Annunzio was known to many of his followers, but also to the crowds that gathered to hear him before and after the war. In the following pages I want to argue that fascism draws on D'Annunzio's new symbolic politics in the way it perceives the relation between *il Duce*, the masses, and the dead. I hope to draw parallels between *Notturno*'s corporal politics and fascist cultural practices by examining their respective uses of the dead for creating subjects.<sup>3</sup> A sustained examination of *Notturno* and a number of Mussolini's speeches and biographies from the period immediately following the March on Rome show the bodies of both D'Annunzio and Mussolini changing thanks to their close relation to the patria, marking them fundamentally as modern prophets. In each instance a convalescence spells a closer proximity to the dead, which in turn leads to corporal and subjective transformation. Thus the stakes of the argument run not only to the kind of bodies fascism privileges—the hardened bodies of fascist subjects are by now commonplace—but also to the forms of memory and remembering (the pun will have been anticipated) and the ways fascism links prophecy to corporal transformation. How does a rhetoric of remembered bodies in *Notturno* alter our perspectives on fascism?

---

<sup>3</sup>Two seminal commentaries often elided on *Notturno*, the symbolic relation of D'Annunzio's memoir to the dead. For Renato Barilli, the connections running from D'Annunzio to fascism are located principally in D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume; *Notturno* merely announcing the future aesthetic republic of Fiume. For Paolo Valesio, *Notturno* is "the most beautiful long prose poem in Italian literature after Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*" (xviii). Thus his emphasis falls on marking the work's indebtedness both to Baudelaire and Ungaretti (117-118).

My discussion begins with the events surrounding D'Annunzio's writing of *Notturno*—namely the war wounds that immobilized him in 1915—and then moves to a closer reading of the dismembering and remembering of the deceased in the narrative. I insist that the text enacts a ritualized dismemberment both of D'Annunzio's dead comrades as well as his own body through its telegraphic economy so as to prepare D'Annunzio and his listeners for body reconstruction that takes place when *il Comandante* addresses the crowd. *Notturno* specifically makes the changes in D'Annunzio's perception of his body relevant to changes in the political body of Italy via a rhetoric of sacrifice. Interestingly, *Notturno* links this body refashioning to an Oedipal drama in which D'Annunzio's mother sanctions the reconfiguration of D'Annunzio and his listeners as metallized bodies, who now hear the message of sacrifice the *patria* is sending. In the final section I examine fascist uses of the dead, its project for constructing the new fascist man, and the debt fascism owes *Notturno*'s procedures for body and subject refashioning. Such a debt, I argue, suggests future lines of inquiry concerning D'Annunzio's influence on fascist symbolic practices.

### *The Genesis of Notturno*

*Notturno* owes much of its narrative force to World War I, to D'Annunzio's military service, and to the memoir's curious publishing history. When war broke out in France in 1915 (Italy, we recall, joined the Allies a year after the outbreak of war), D'Annunzio was residing in France, avoiding his many creditors. Agitating almost immediately for Italian intervention—principally through his weekly dispatches in *Corriere della sera*—D'Annunzio effectively legitimated the interventionist position among the formerly ambivalent.<sup>4</sup> Returning to Italy in the spring of 1915, he gave a series of speeches (later collected and published the same year no less in *La più grande Italia*). There he put forward the case for war to thousands of rapt listeners, utilizing apocalyptic imagery in nationalist-charged language. In these important speeches, D'Annunzio rehearsed themes and rhetoric that would figure so prominently in the discourses he gave over the course of the Fiume occupation from 1919 to 1921.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>For his efforts, the French government in a neat *quid pro quo* suspended the seizure of D'Annunzio's French residence and the seizure of his belongings owing to his amassed debts. See Turchetta vii-xvi and De Felice vii-xxx.

<sup>5</sup>In my forthcoming *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi* I examine the nexus of apocalypse and media in D'Annunzio's Fiume discourses.

Not only did D'Annunzio speak in favour of the war, but he fought in it and flew over it as well. When Italy declared war in the summer of 1915, the Italian state happily enrolled the fifty-two years old D'Annunzio in the infantry, hoping perhaps for star-like propaganda turns for the troops that would soon become a Hollywood fixture (Guglielmo Marconi would perform much the same service for Italy during the First World War). D'Annunzio quickly volunteered, however, for the nascent Italian air force and was soon flying missions, one of which included the later leaflet dropping campaign over Vienna in 1918. On one such mission on 16 January 1916, D'Annunzio was forced to make an emergency landing at sea. The subject of much speculation ever since—some obviously promoted by D'Annunzio himself—what seems clear is that he struck his right temple on the airplane's machine gun in the crash, losing his right eye and nearly his left as well. Ordered by his doctors to remain in bed immobilized for an indeterminate period of time (three months by D'Annunzio's count), he began one of the oddest scenes of convalescence in Italian literature, all of which he describes in painstaking detail in *Notturno*. Soon after, and in suspiciously quick fashion, his eyesight improved sufficiently for him to begin flying once more.

The publishing success of the memoir—it ranks as one of D'Annunzio's best selling works of the period—underscores how well he used his convalescence to highlight a newly designed system of writing. As D'Annunzio relates it, he was temporarily blind after the crash and yet desperate to write, despite (or on account of) his doctor's entreaties to avoid any direct contact with light. Traditional writing seemed out of the question, though other choices were available to him. He could have opted for the typewriter, which a half-blind Nietzsche had used.<sup>6</sup> Yet D'Annunzio never seriously considered the possibility. Dictation was another and indeed D'Annunzio will employ stenography regularly during the occupation of Fiume to compose his speeches. But in *Notturno* he cannot overcome “the ancient repugnance for dictation” [4; “l'antica repugnanza alla dettatura”]. Finally he opts for a writing system that resembles the ancient inscriptions with which the Sibyl, the Greek prophetess inspired by Apollo,

---

<sup>6</sup>See Kittler 183-208. Most accounts of the Nietzschean anxiety of influence on D'Annunzio continue to focus on the superman and the ideological assumptions that underpin both writers, especially in D'Annunzio's *Trionfo della morte*. A study of D'Annunzio's engagement with the writing machines of his day might well point to a more encompassing material affinity between their two modes of writing.

wrote her predictions on leaves.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the immobilized D'Annunzio writes on a “short piece of paper that contains one line,” using “the thumb and middle finger of his right hand, balanced on the border of the paper” in order to guide the pen [3; “sopra una stretta lista di carta che contiene una riga”; “il pollice e il medio della mano destra, poggiati su gli orli della lista”]. Sensing “the edge of the paper below with the upper phalanx of the right little finger” allows him to maintain the straightness of the lines written [3; “l'ultima falange del mignolo destro l'orlo di sotto”].

Writing this way bears directly on *Notturno*'s fragmented style. First, the necessity of containing his thoughts on smaller and shorter slips of paper forces D'Annunzio to adopt a telegraphic economy when writing that little resembles his earlier prose. Shorter sentences and the pronounced lack of dependent clauses in favour of a simpler subject-predicate structure are the principal effects of the Sibylline writing system. Second, such an economy of writing leads in turn a dismembering style of description—what critics of D'Annunzio refer obliquely to as the poet's “nocturnal phase”—which, as I will soon show, dovetails with the descriptions of vigils D'Annunzio holds over the bodies of his recently deceased co-pilots.<sup>8</sup> Finally, writing fragments allows D'Annunzio to organize them in such a way as to construct chronoschisms, those chronological misdirections that characterize much of the narrative both in *Notturno* as well as the earlier *Leda senza cigno* and *Licenza*.<sup>9</sup> On this note, D'Annunzio composed *Notturno* over five different periods and not, as the text would have us believe, simply in the period immediately following his accident. Indeed,

---

<sup>7</sup>“There you will see the distracted prophetess/Who deep inside the rock foretells the fates/And commits words in writing to the leaves,/Sets them in order and puts them in her cave” (Virgil 70).

<sup>8</sup>For Turchetta such a phase is one of the most clamorous examples of literary blinders ever constructed. Too many critics take D'Annunzio at his word when he himself announces the hypothesis of a ‘nocturnal D'Annunzio’ (xvi-xix). As will soon become clear, I part ways with Turchetta's analysis, especially to the degree he lessens the significance of the dictation that underpins *Notturno*.

<sup>9</sup>In her groundbreaking analysis, Ursula Heise defines chronoschisms as those moments when experiences of time compete and coexist in narratives. Although such features are typical of modern and postmodern literature, we do well, however, to mark their distinguishing features: “But the [Postmodernist] narrative technique differs from that of high-modernist and late-modernist novels in two fundamental respects: the differing accounts or flashbacks are not linked to the voice or mind of any narrator or character configured with a view toward psychological realism, and they tell event sequences in contradictory and mutually exclusive versions” (Heise, 53).

D'Annunzio furiously edited the manuscript in the period following his occupation of Fiume in 1921, heightening the apocalyptic tone of his observations by casting them as the product of the Sibylline system, as well as allowing him to adopt the prophetic persona of one who sees far into Italy's future. The collaboration of remembered bodies and apocalyptic imagery will anticipate a number of fascist ideas regarding the nature of the new fascist man himself.

### *Dispersed Connections*

These then are the details surrounding *Notturno*'s publication. In the following section I want to set out how the memoir readies D'Annunzio for his transformation into a modern prophet. The process begins with the text's references to D'Annunzio's deathly resemblance to the war dead. The memoir does so by linking the biographic details I noted above, in particular his enforced immobility, to them. D'Annunzio is dead to the degree he feels "in his entire posture the rigidity of an Egyptian scribe sculpted in basalt" [3; "in tutta la mia attitudine la rigidità di uno scriba egizio scolpito nel basalto"]. Later he senses from his ankles to his neck "a wish for inertia" that renders him "immobile as if an embalmer had actually completed his work on me" [6; "una volontà d'inerzia"; "fisso come se veramente l'imbalsamatore avesse compiuta su me la sua opera"]. *Notturno* takes up the image of embalmment soon after and associates it with convalescence. His body itself dissolves thanks to the fluids his doctors inject into his eye: "with a needle the doctor injects sodium chloride into the sclera, he introduces water into the damaged eye where the coastal wave is clouded with crusted yellow" [76; "il dottore m'inietta con un ago il cloruro di sodio nella sclera, m'intromette l'acqua nell'occhio leso dove s'incupisce l'onda marina crestata di gialliccio"]. Consequently, D'Annunzio's body appears "as if at the onset of its dissolution. I am full of substances that disintegrate and of fermenting juices. I hear in myself the gurgles that I already heard late at night holding vigil over the corpses among the funerary garlands" [94; "come all'inizio del dissolvimento. Sono pieno di sostanze che si disgregano e di succhi che fermentono. Odo in me il gorgoglio che udii già nell'alta notte vegliando le salme tra le corone funerarie"]. Such images recall many others from D'Annunzio's catalogue of decadent tropes. Here as elsewhere the object is always the same: the references to decay make D'Annunzio's body more seductive.<sup>10</sup> But for whom are these displays of dissolution intended?

The answer lies in the peculiarity of *Notturno*'s convalescence, which

---

<sup>10</sup>See Weir on the relation between seduction, modernity, and the decaying body.

combines immobility with temporary blindness so as to create the conditions for prophetic vision. And here D'Annunzio is not content to be merely blind; rather, he glosses blindness as a form of traumatic vision or, better, a traumatized eye that throws up images of the past and future. The result is a form of cinematic and kinetic subjectivity that doubles as prophetic vision. To see what I mean, consider the cinematic qualities of these image streams. D'Annunzio writes: "Beneath the bandage the back of my eye is enflamed like a summer noon at the Mouth of the Arno" [4; "Sotto la benda il fondo del mio occhio ferito fiammeggi come il meriggio estivo di Bocca d'Arno"]. Giving off heat and light, the eye relentlessly projects images from D'Annunzio's life, illuminating for his mind's eye the darker recesses of memory: "In my wounded eye my life's materials are reforged, [as is] the entire sum of my knowledge. It is inhabited by an evocative flame, and is continually tormented" [11; "Nel mio occhio piagato si rifugia tutta la materia della mia vita, tutta la somma della mia conoscenza. Esso è abitato da un fuoco evocatore, continuamente in travaglio"]. The images that move before him appear without warning and beyond any conscious intention in calling them forth.<sup>11</sup>

I want to insist on the cinematic qualities of this particular trauma for two reasons. First, in most accounts of the period under discussion, attention continues to focus on the kinetic character of the modern subject, in which movement nourishes myths and narratives of agency. As helpful as these observations are for understanding modern subjectivity, *Notturno*'s perspective on immobility offers a different perspective. Precisely because he cannot move, D'Annunzio is subject to long sequences of images transmitted by the body. In *Notturno*'s corporal system of illumination that features the traumatically cinematic, a non-seeing eye throws up images of its own accord that keep D'Annunzio enthralled and motionless. Given D'Annunzio's immobility, he is subjected to these images over which he has little power. "Tonight," he writes, "the demon takes my burning eye in the palm of his hand and blows on it with the force of his swollen cheeks. All the images come into focus" [64; "Stanotte il dèmone prende il mio occhio acceso nella palma della mano e ci soffia sopra con la forze delle gote gonfie. Tutte le imagini si affocano"]. Typically, the sequences of moving images from the war employ a cinematic form, in long tracking

---

<sup>11</sup>Memories projected by a damaged eye recall the cinematic forms of perception that were a part of the period's perception of movement. Considering D'Annunzio's interest in film, notably the 1912 feature, *Cabiria*, depicting memories as images projected would not have been out of the ordinary for the period. See Chimirri 45-47.

shots that detail the most desperate moments of a series of battles of the First World War.

The switch to immobile projection in *Notturno* is significant because in its reorganization of D'Annunzio's vision *Notturno* will highlight different features of what he desires, in this instance movement in all its forms. Although we should not be hasty in thinking this together with what we know of fascist aesthetics, *Notturno* makes of movement not only a fetish, but a metaphysical and aesthetic category around which a set of symbolic practices revolve.<sup>12</sup> I will have more to say about such connections shortly, but at this juncture, I want to argue simply that enforced immobility heightens the fantasy of mobility and its impact on agency in the memoir. This cinematic subject is the foundation upon which *Notturno* constructs D'Annunzio as prophet.

### *Technological Subjects*

To this juncture I have expressly linked D'Annunzio's broken body to *Notturno*'s elaboration of a prophetic persona. Yet, as became clear in the preceding section, a slip occurs in *Notturno* between prophecy and D'Annunzio's technological make-over. Indeed, *Notturno* repeatedly conflates the two in the above passages and elsewhere so that one might well argue that D'Annunzio's transformation is authorized not only by a deathly resemblance to the dead, but also by his resemblance to certain technological advances of the period, cinematic illumination in particular. But *Notturno* invokes much more than cinema, utilizing changes on D'Annunzio's body as the symptomology of a new technological subject, one intimately linked with the formation of the crowd as an actor in Italian history. It does so by highlighting the acoustic porousness of D'Annunzio and later the masses themselves.

*Notturno* first registers these corporal changes in the speech D'Annunzio gives in the Campidoglio on the eve of Italy's declaration of war in 1915. Half dead in D'Annunzio's words—"Nothing remains in me. I am like the demon of the uproar, I am the genius of the free people" [58; "Non v'è più nulla di me in me. Sono come il dèmone del tumulto, sono come il genio del popolo libero"]—he notes the physical changes he undergoes when speaking:

Parlo. Ogni mia parola rintrona sotto il mio cranio come ripercossa dal metallo concavo. Ogni soffio mi sforza il cerchio del petto. Ne soffro e sono altero che la mia gioia sia mista di patimento. È come il dolore di

---

<sup>12</sup>Schnapp, "Crash" 23-25.

una creazione, è come l'angoscia di una nascita (58).

[I speak. Each of my words reverberates in my cranium as if rebounded by the concave metal. Each breath strains the circle of my chest. I suffer and am proud that my joy is mixed with torment. It resembles the pain of a creation, it is like the anxiety of a birth.]

D'Annunzio speaks, but nowhere does *Notturno* divulge the contents. Rather the emphasis here and elsewhere returns to the act of speaking and its role in generating a new body and with it a new subjectivity.<sup>13</sup> As D'Annunzio goes on to describe it, the imagined body features principally a porousness: initially his own words penetrate his cranium, soon followed by the cries of the crowd. In the cacophony of voices that succeed his speech, D'Annunzio is “oppressed by a cry louder than any other. I lose myself in the pauses of my voice. It seems the commanding cry questions more than it speaks” [59; “sopraffatto da un grido più alto d'ogni altro, smarrisco nella pausa la mia voce. Sembra che l'imperioso grido domandi più che la parola”]. The acoustic horizon of such a body is wide indeed, as it registers and amplifies the sounds directed to it. Interestingly, the cacophony of voices shifts almost immediately, becoming the “new silence of the crowd,” which D'Annunzio likens to “a vortex that attracts me and encircles me, like a tumult that sucks and destroys my life” [59; “il nuovo silenzio della folla”; “un vortice che m'attira e m'aggira, è come un gorgo che sugge e distrugge la mia vita”]. It is in this interplay between silence and D'Annunzio's words that *Notturno* locates most forcefully crowd construction in acoustic terms.

Few have commented directly on the imagined features of D'Annunzio's transformed body as he speaks before the crowd, or for that matter the mechanism by which silence and discourse interact to generate the crowd; their attention is turned rather to the figuration of the crowd and the associations D'Annunzio draws between a sculptor's craft and generating a crowd.<sup>14</sup> Yet, a sustained examination of *Notturno*'s figuration of D'Annunzio as prophet shows something unexpected—not only does

---

<sup>13</sup> Typical of D'Annunzio of course is the implicit misogyny associated with procreation. “Indeed, what Roger Williams calls ‘the horror of life’ is largely a horror of procreation, which inevitably entails the hatred of the woman who made procreation possible” (Weir xiv).

<sup>14</sup> The lone exception is Jeffrey Schnapp who insists on the quality of the silence imposed at Fiume (and by extension in *Notturno*) as an “immobile gestuality, monumental and commemorative,” which he affirms as the virile alternative to writing (Schnapp, “Le parole” 38).

D'Annunzio see cinematically, but he hears over great distance and across time. He does so thanks to a hybrid body that assumes the characteristics of some of the period's best known acoustic technology, in this instance those amplification and receiving devices (namely the telegraph and radio) that were altering the medial topography of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

In the above example, *Notturno* metaphorically sets out a scene of transmission and reception in which a future formation of *patria* transmits its messages to D'Annunzio, who in turn will relay them to the crowd. Thus, "I hear the name of the Fatherland and a great shiver runs through me. I hear the name of the Fatherland again and the same shiver passes through all my marrow" [72; "odo il nome di Patria; e un gran brivido mi attraversa. Odo di nuovo il nome di Patria: e il medesimo brivido mi passa per tutte le midolle"]. D'Annunzio becomes a sensitive listening device that hears where others cannot. Such a susceptibility to a certain kind of message complements the cinematic vision I noted above, filling out D'Annunzio's prophetic persona. In ways familiar to readers of *Forse che sì forse che no*, D'Annunzio perceives the transformations occurring on his body as linked to larger historical changes in perception.

### *Mothers, Sons, and the Patria*

We are now in a position to return to the question I posed earlier concerning the sanctioning of these corporal changes. Certainly the initial resemblance that *Notturno* sets out between D'Annunzio and the dead allows him to speak in their name. Yet as we read further into the memoir, we find D'Annunzio haunted less by the dead than by his mother. Indeed, in the discursive relation the poet enjoys with his mother, *Notturno* will locate the ultimate authorization for D'Annunzio's position as medium for a future *patria*. As often as D'Annunzio foregrounds her presence in *Notturno*, readers continue to marginalize her importance when discussing *Notturno*'s political vision. Such a lacuna is all the more curious since D'Annunzio dedicates his memoir to her—"I consecrate these pages written with blood to the love, to the pain, and to the death of my mother"—and repeatedly ventriloquizes her in the "Seconda Offerta" [1; "All'amore al dolore e alla morte di mia madre queste pagine scritte col sangue consacro"].

And so what is her role in *Notturno*? Essentially, she provides a model for speaking in the name of and listening to the *patria*. Not surprisingly, the procedure begins much as it did with D'Annunzio's futural vision, namely with a trauma occasioned by war. Just as D'Annunzio is remembering "a horrible shaking that uprooted in me," which occurred during

one particularly violent encounter during the war, he suddenly perceives his mother inside him [74; “uno squasso atroce che sradica in me”]: “She was in me, inside me, in the period of struggle and passion. I carried her inside me, just as she carried me, living in her pulse and breath” [75; “Era in me, dentro me, nel tempo della lotta e della furia. La portavo dentro me, com’ella mi portò, vivente in polso e in respiro”]. Her effects are anything but deleterious to D’Annunzio’s martial spirit. Returning to battle, he discovers within himself a greater enthusiasm thanks to his mother’s bent “towards mutilation and death,” which she transmits to her son at birth [74; “alla mutilazione e alla morte”].

Of course mothers have since time immemorial instilled in their sons a love for the native land in the Oedipal drama played out across nations. But *Notturno* adds a new twist to such moments when it specifically links a desire to defend the *patria* with a primary orality that mothers generate in their sons.<sup>15</sup> Thus *Notturno* is littered with countless references to his and her mouth: “And it seems to me that as I licked the tears I was doing so with the mouth of my mother, with that deformed mouth that lies heavy in me, that suffers in me” [84; “E mi sembra di lambirle con la bocca di mia madre, con quella bocca deformata che pesa in me, che soffre in me”]. He recalls those moments his mother read to him as a child: “From her mouth the sonnets of the *Vita Nuova* touch me deep inside just as they did when I read them as a sixteen-year old along the green embankment of the Affrico” [88; “[P]er la sua bocca i sonetti della *Vita Nuova* mi toccano a dentro come quando, a sedici anni, li leggevo lungo l’argine dell’Affrico erboso”]. Calling upon the mouth of the mother, especially that from which D’Annunzio first hears the words of Dante, serves two purposes: first it links motherhood to a nascent Italian identity via the mode of speaking and listening she instils in her son. A feedback loop results in which young D’Annunzio desires to hear Dante spoken by his mother, which later returns in *Notturno* when his daughter reads back to him the sheets of paper on which he has written. In such a way D’Annunzio not only conflates Dante with the voice of his mother, but his own production as well since his daughter reads it back to him. In such a sequence D’Annunzio desires to hear from the mouth of his

---

<sup>15</sup>Renato Barilli senses the first half of the relation when apropos of D’Annunzio’s later output, he writes: “the Author arrived at a sort of society without fathers, as many writers linked to German Expressionism younger than he will want” [247; “Si può ben dire che in questa sua stagione avanzata l’Autore abbia raggiunto una sorta di storia senza padri, come vorranno scrittori di lui più giovani appartenenti all’atmosfera dell’Espressionismo tedesco”]

mother/daughter not simply his own words or the words of Dante, but in them the sounds of the *patria* spoken by his mother. Motherhood and poetry become the media by which the *patria* constructs an Italian identity given to sacrifice.

*Notturno* shows D'Annunzio adopting a similar procedure when speaking to the crowd. Essentially he occupies the slot reserved for his mother in their interaction. Taking over her position, he instructs the masses in hearing and desiring to hear in his own words the message of the *patria*. To do so, they must practice silence: "Listen, listen. Grave things I have to tell you, things you do not know. Remain in silence. Listen to me and then everyone leap to your feet" [62; "Udite. Udite. Gravissime cose io vi dirò, da voi non conosciute. State in silenzio. Ascoltatemi. Poi balzarete in piedi, tutti"]. Hearing and not speaking, the crowd "no longer breathes. It listens and every syllable penetrates into the perforated bone of the cranium where it remains infixed" [62; "non respira più"; "ogni sillaba penetra nell'osso forato del cranio e ci resta infissa"]. Only after the syllables have been inscribed in silence does the crowd speak, and then their words are combined with movement: "The formidable mass of people is on their feet. The melted colossus is once again made human by its cry." [63; "La massa formidabile è in piedi. Il colosso fuso è di nuovo umanato dal suo urlo"]. In the combination of bodily movement, auditory capacity and nascent orality, D'Annunzio figures himself as the maternal instructor that puts the crowd in touch with the *patria*. It is the haunting of D'Annunzio's body by his mother that produces an eminently political body in the crowd based upon a primitive orality.

Given the power of motherhood in *Notturno* for constructing a collective orality, we should not be surprised to find her also sanctioning a re-membering of D'Annunzio's body. D'Annunzio's immobile body, which had formerly occupied the zone between the dead and the living, is now re-membered differently in its encounters with the masses. In place of mere limbs collected together, we have instead a new body that consists primarily of an ear and a mouth. Thus D'Annunzio's later musings on bodies transformed by their capacity for hearing the *patria*: "There is a convulsed and bloody body, and in that mangled throbbing flesh there is a vigilant ear, there is the apex of the soul that listens and gasps" [135; "C'è un corpo convulso e sanguinoso; e in tutto quello strazio palpante c'è un orecchio vigile, c'è un apice d'anima che ascolta e anela"]. And later when speaking to a dead comrade: "My mother speaks to him through my mouth just as his mother did" [137; "Mia madre per la mia bocca gli parla come gli parlava sua madre"]. This makes sense to the degree *Notturno* sees D'Annunzio as both the crowds' progenitor as well as its instructor in speaking together.

er. Indeed, *Notturno* makes D'Annunzio's body into the principal vehicle by which other bodies are linked to the *patria*; its presence joins one body to another in the name of the *patria*.

Here then we have a confluence of factors that contribute to D'Annunzio's transformation into a prophet. First, D'Annunzio's nearness to the dead offers him a position from which he can speak for them. Second, the mode by which his hearing and vision approximate the period's technologies arms his words with an inevitability that will be useful in persuading the crowds to move towards the holocaust fires set by the *patria*.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the staging of the encounters with the crowd as moments in an Oedipal drama allows him to cast himself as the maternal origin of their speech.

### *Fascism and the Dead*

How do we want to link *Notturno*'s staging of prophecy with fascism's construction of the masses? For fascism of course, the process of generating the crowd is first and foremost a process of creating the fascist man. Such a project is accomplished both by Mussolini's words and the spectacles that accompany his discourse: the call and response of the crowds and the speaker and the symbols of Italian nationalism that together spell "a sacralization of politics in modern society" [Gentile, *Il culto* 269; "sacralizzazione della politica nella società moderna"]. Fascism's ultimate purpose was to complete what the Italian Risorgimento had left unfulfilled, namely how to make Italians. For such a project fascism mobilized culture: "Fascist culture must be the life and the expression of life; it must create a type of man, a new man, a whole man, the same man for the family, for society, and for the state" [Gentile, *Fascismo* 260; "la cultura fascista deve essere vita ed espressione di vita; deve creare un tipo di uomo, l'uomo nuovo, l'uomo intero: simile nella famiglia, nella società, nello Stato"]. Here the hundreds of thousands who had recently died and the million more that were wounded in the First World War provide fascism with something Risorgimento leaders and others had never had: models of sacrifice that could be drawn upon when devising an appropriate rhetoric and imagery for creating "l'uomo nuovo." Read in such a key, *Notturno* and fascism are both products of a culture of death growing out of World War I; *Notturno*'s obsession with the recent dead and their commemoration mirrors a tendency within fascism to exploit the dead in order to model future behaviour.

In the matter of the dead, fascism clearly realized the importance of properly commemorating them, be they the war dead or fascist martyrs

---

<sup>16</sup>See Serra 9-25.

(and of course conflating the two was essential to fascism's designs). Fascist cultural practices and built spaces — from the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Vittoriano to the cult of the “war dead” [“culto dei caduti”], to the exhibit of the Fascist Revolution in 1932 — evoke the dead both as examples of an *esprit de corps* and of the kind of sacrifices the *patria* requires of its subjects.<sup>17</sup> At a minimum, then, fascism seems intent on making the dead relevant for creating the new fascist man.<sup>18</sup>

However, as our reading of *Notturno* shows, a promiscuous relation between the living and the dead has consequences well beyond modeling sacrifice. In the interaction between the crowd and D'Annunzio, *Notturno* inscribes the changes *il Comandante* undergoes within a narrative of corporal and subjective transformation brought on by the *patria*, which in turn creates the conditions for prophetic vision. Haunted by the dead, D'Annunzio listens acutely for the message the *patria* sends him; the body that results is outfitted with acute hearing and cinematic vision in order to listen and see temporally into the past and future. Not only a technological, but a political body emerges from the greater proximity of the dead. Is there anything remotely similar in fascism?

Fascism, too, had its mythical convalescence in Mussolini's wounding during the war that enables his contact with the dead. And here accounts of Mussolini's war wounds and subsequent convalescence follow *Notturno*'s pattern, linking him deeply to his fallen comrades. Summarizing these accounts, Sergio Luzzatto notes how “Mussolini transformed his convalescence propagandistically into a descent into the realm of the dead; he wanted to treat his wounds as a gesture of pity towards the war dead so as finally to merit the eternal recognition of their mothers and widows. Mussolini knew therefore how to escape from the inferno of the Carso, having overcome the ultimate test of a blood offering” [4; “Mussolini ha trasformato la convalescenza in occasione propagandistica per una discesa nel regno dei morti: ha voluto curare le proprie piaghe come gesto di pietà

---

<sup>7</sup> Considering that Mussolini's speeches in the Piazza Venezia were staged not simply in front of the vast crowds, but also to the side of the Vittoriano's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the symbolic presence of the dead provides Mussolini with an imaginative address for the speeches themselves. Addressing the dead and the living in such a way brings them powerfully together, reinforcing the “transferral of the individual death, obscene and unspeakable to collective life” [Canal 660; “trasferimento della morte singola, oscena e indicibile alla vita collettiva”].

<sup>18</sup> Fascism also registered the importance of the dead in its “il culto dei caduti.”

See in particular Gentile, *Il culto* 131-138 and Schnapp, “Epic Demonstrations” 10-11.

nei confronti dei caduti, fino a meritare ... l'eterna riconoscenza delle madri e delle vedove dei morti. Mussolini ha quindi saputo uscire dall'inferno del Carso avendo superato la prova supreme dell'offerta di sangue”]. The descent into the realm of the dead creates an intimacy between those who survive and those who do not that will form the basis of the solidarity linking war veterans to a vision of a greater Italy. Another way of saying this is simply that the distance between the dead and the living is less for those who have faced death. For Mussolini, the shortened distance will be figured more broadly, however, as the identity between fascism and the *patria*. Fascism, and only fascism, knows the intimate desires of the *patria*; the metonymy of the dead and the *patria* continually undergird its early attempts to speak for Italy itself.

Here Mussolini occupies a key position in fascism's attempt to speak for the *patria*. Having been near death, he sees more clearly the nature of future sacrifice; he can now prophesize a time when the dead and the living will march together under the banner of Italy. In this regard, Mussolini's discourse of 19 May 1918 is paradigmatic: “I no longer see banished to the distant future the coming day in which the banners of the wounded come before the ragged and glorious banners of the regiments. And gathered around the banners will be the veterans and the people. There will also be the long shadows of our dead, all of our dead, from those that fell in the Alps to those that sacrificed themselves beyond the Isonzo” [Simonini 137; “Non vedo più relegato nelle lontanane dell'avvenire il giorno in cui i gonfaloni dei mutilati precederanno le bandiere lacere e gloriose dei reggimenti. E attorno alle bandiere ci saranno i reduci e il popolo. Ci saranno anche le ombre grandi dei nostri morti, di tutti i nostri morti”]. Not only does Mussolini trace the realization of the *patria* as a moment of connection between the living and the dead, but he circumscribes mnemonic space for the war dead within the borders of “il popolo” itself. As that space expands to include the dead's recent sacrifice, the “popolo” will be transformed. Again and again fascist symbolic practices imagine scenarios in which a symbiosis between the dead and Mussolini is concretized so as to authorize his speaking for Italy.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Thus *Il Popolo dell'Italia* from 4 November 1924: “Fascism took power through the proxy and the procurement of the combatants, both living and dead, and wants to continue to govern in the name of this sublime investiture. Benito Mussolini is the man who restored the temple of profaned Italy” [Gentile, *Il culto* 73; “Il fascismo prese il potere per la delega e la procura dei combattenti, vivi e morti e vuole continuare a governare in nome di questa sublima investitura. Benito Mussolini è l'uomo , il quale [...] restaurò il tempio dell'Italia profonata”]

As time goes on, fascist communicative strategies will have less need of the dead as a medium for the *patria*, signalling the move to a more proper cult of *il Duce*. By means of modern media, fascism will soon present Mussolini as the embodiment of the *patria* itself. Simultaneously, Mussolini's body will grow in importance as the mnemonic space reserved for the dead diminishes. Speaking of the spectacularization of the body of *il Duce*, Mario Isnenghi hints at such a change when he speaks of the spectacularization of the body of *il Duce* and the extraordinary pervasiveness of this body-corpus that newspapers, cinema, radio, and the famous Mussolini "sayings" ["detti"] constructed. Taken together, these different formats construct "a communicative strategy of great capillarity," whose ultimate purpose is to provide "a metaphoric offering of his body-corpus, and the obligation to feed on and nourish oneself spiritually from him" [413; "una strategia comunicativa di grande capillarità"; "offerta metaforica del suo corpo-corpus, obbligo di cibarsi e nutrirsi spiritualmente di lui"]. Isnenghi links Mussolini to the Italian masses via a religious metaphor: Mussolini's body as the secular body of Christ. But beyond connections to the Christological sacred, the appearance of Mussolini across different media suggests something more radical: a communicative model in which the masses do not simply nourish themselves on the body of Mussolini, but more productively are asked to reassemble *il Duce* out of the various formats in which he appears. The suturing of image, sound, and print by the public constructs for *il Duce* an eminently technological body with great symbolic force. It is by identifying with this body that the masses will not only move closer to the *patria*, but also to fascism itself.

It is a sure testament to fascism's success in co-opting the dead for their nationalistic vision early on that the emphasis could shift more forcefully later to Mussolini's body as a locus of feeling for the *patria*. In such a scenario, Mussolini's body not only carries the memories of the dead, but becomes a surface for the projection of images associated with the *patria*. In this sense it makes sense to speak of a collaboration between sacralization and technologization when speaking of the years of consensus, roughly 1928 to 1938. What differs between these later moments and fascism's earlier use of the dead is little more than the kind of medium used to contact the *patria*.

The differences with *Notturno* in this regard ought to be made clear. In *Notturno* the technologization of D'Annunzio's body spells a closer relation to the *patria*; he does not simply embody the *patria*, but rather is brought in closer acoustic contact with the *patria* thanks to his relation to the dead; thus he prophesizes a future *patria*. Fascism too, at least in the

initial years, projects Mussolini in similar terms thanks to his proximity to the war dead. Fascist culture parts ways with *Notturno*, however, when it later identifies Mussolini completely with the *patria* itself via his distribution via mass media. D'Annunzio's relation to the *patria* never reaches the kind of severe coupling we later have in fascism between the *patria* and *il Duce*. Once the installation of the *Duce* cult begins, the distance that allows Mussolini to speak for the dead and the *patria* gives way to another communicative strategy that will utilize the period's technology to lessen the distance considerably.

Be that as it may, in the years immediately following the March on Rome Mussolini remains a spokesman for the *patria*. In order to justify that status, fascist culture calls upon Mussolini's mother in order both to authorize Mussolini's contact with the *patria* and to model, in her relation to her son, the kind of subject relation fascism hoped to construct between subjects and the *patria* itself. Despite the enormous strides made over the last twenty years in examining the social and political space fascism dedicated to women, little work has been done on the uses to which fascist cultural practices put Mussolini's mother.<sup>20</sup> What we do know is that her figure, unlike Mussolini's wife and children, had enormous symbolic power for fascist culture.

Ella rappresenterà anche il legame con la cultura, con la conoscenza, con l'educazione. Infine la sua immagine sullo sfondo di quella del duce riderà vita al simbolo fortissimo del rapporto madre/figlio, in una reinterpretazione adeguata alla esaltazione multipla della madrepatria delle madri dei morti e dei mutilati, del rapporto tra maternità e patriottismo femminile. La fedeltà alla memoria della madre diventerà anche il segno di un'altra fedeltà, giacchè nelle parole del duce, citate dal Beltramelli, 'rinnegare la Patria vuol dire rinnegare la madre' (Passerini 49).

[She will also represent the link to culture, to learning, and to education. Lastly, against the backdrop of the *Duce*, her image will give life to a powerful symbol of the relationship between mother and son, in a reinterpretation adequate to the multiple exaltation of the motherland of the mothers of the dead and wounded, and the relationship between maternity and a feminine form of patriotism. The faithfulness to the memory of the mother will also become the sign of another faithfulness, inasmuch as, in Mussolini's words cited by Beltramelli, "renouncing the Fatherland means renouncing one's mother."]

In a hierarchy of feeling, the memory of mother is the ultimate fount from which fascism will draw its hyper-nationalism. In the above passage this

---

20 See De Grazia.

occurs when fascism elides the differences between motherhood and the *patria*. The implicit result—as the passage makes evident—is the transformation of subjects into sons. The gendering of the fascist subject as masculine is no surprise, but to see the fascist subject as a son of Italy (and by metonymy of Mussolini’s mother) is a descriptor most analyses overlook. Tracing the destiny of this rhetorical move within fascist cultural practices is well beyond the range of this paper, but within the scope of the metaphor which conceives the fascist subject as the son of a mother who animates the *patria*, a semantics develops that postulates Mussolini’s mother (and by extension motherhood) as a model for the relation between subjects and *patria*.

At the same time, fascist biographies of Mussolini beginning with Sarfatti’s *Dux* in 1925 emphasize the genetic inheritance she bequeaths to her son. It is Mussolini’s mother, who transmits to her son “a difference transformed by him into a force of domination” [Passerini 50; “una differenza da lui trasformata in forza di dominio”]. This occurs thanks to a corporal resemblance between the two in which, as one biographer put it, “he suffered as did his mother from a nervous system that was always ready to break apart even though resilient” [Passerini 50; “e pur soffriva anche di lui, di quel sistema nervoso sempre pronto a spezzarsi eppur forte, come il suo proprio”]. To the degree, Mussolini shares a nervous system on the verge of a hysterical breakdown with his mother, these accounts concretize his body as one acutely sensitive to the demands the *patria* makes. The effect here, as for D’Annunzio, is to authorize a speaking for the *patria* that depends upon a ghostly resemblance between mother and son.

### *Media and Mediums*

As this paper closes, I want to address myself to some of the larger implications that a reading of prophecy and body transformations in *Notturno* occasions. As I pointed out in the introduction, the traditional view of the D’Annunzian legacy vis-à-vis fascism finds the poet elaborating symbolic practices that fascism will appropriate when enrolling the masses. Both will ask them to identify with a hyper Italian nationalism conveyed in recognizably religious forms. Beginning with Renzo De Felice, George Mosse and continuing today in the work of Emilio Gentile, discussions of D’Annunzio’s occupation of Fiume (and by implication *Notturno*) continue to linger over the twenty-month adventure as a sort of antechamber to fascist symbolic practices. The ceremonies, the flags, and above all the theatrical stagings of D’Annunzio’s discourses work equally well for generating crowds in the principal piazza of Fiume or larger masses across Italy during fascism. Such a view of D’Annunzio’s legacy, however, fails to consider for instance other avenues of influence beyond the stage directions

and models he provided at Fiume. One important implication of our reading of *Notturno*, therefore, is the analogous symbolic uses to which both D'Annunzio and fascism put the dead, both in the roles they could play as models of sacrifice and as foils for the transformations they hoped to enact on their respective massed crowds.

Equally, the changes D'Annunzio marks while blind allow us to witness the rhetorical moves implicit in his becoming a prophet for the *patria*, steps that *il Duce* too will take. Crucial beyond the role of the dead is convalescence as a sign of proximity to the reign of the dead and then linking the dead to the *patria* via a defence of memory. Recognizing the important role the dead could play as a medium for the *patria*, fascism brandishes Mussolini's own convalescence for similar ends. Finally, *Notturno*'s enlistment of D'Annunzio's mother as transcendent model for a new form of subjectivity recalls as well the broader role of motherhood in fascism, not simply for the reproduction of the race "razza", but more intimately as the idealization of the *patrial* subject relation.

Finally, my reading suggests a different format of fascist bodies, one less given to Futurist metaphors of hardness than to the re-membering possibilities of the masses themselves. An examination of *Notturno*'s bodies suggests that we have much less to do with speed than with the reappearance of decadent motifs amidst the dead, whose purpose is to authorize a new relation between subjects and the *patria*. And indeed, examinations of futurism help little in understanding how fascism comes to generate a sense of sacrifice among those listening. *Notturno* points us instead in the direction of technologically inflected prophecy when considering the advent of fascism and its capacity to reach the masses. Much more remains to be done in these areas, both in examinations of how fascist culture understood maternal orality and its relation to the fascist project, and in D'Annunzio's later attempts at imagining Italian identity precisely through corporal changes. We may find a striking symmetry in how both imaginatively work through their hoped-for changes to Italian subjects.

Cornell University

#### Works Cited

- Atkinson, David and Denis Cosgrove. "Urban Rhetoric and Embodied Identities: City, Nation, and Empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome, 1870-1945." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (1998): 28-49.
- Canal, Claudio. "La retorica della morte. I monumenti ai caduti della grande guerra." *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 11 (1982): 659-669.
- Chimirri, Giovanna Finocchiaro. *D'Annunzio e il cinema cabiria*. Catania: CUECM, 1986.

- D'Annunzio, Gabriele. *Notturno*. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1995.
- De Felice, Renzo. *La penultima ventura: Scritti e discorsi fiumani*. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1974.
- De Grazia, Vittoria. *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Foster, Hal. "Prosthetic Gods." *Modernism/Modernity* 4 (1997): 5-38.
- Gentile, Emilio. *Fascismo: Storia e interpretazione*. Rome: Laterza, 2002.
- . *Il culto del littorio*. Rome: Laterza, 1993.
- Gibellini, Pietro. *D'Annunzio dal gesto al testo*. Milan: Mursia, 1995.
- Heise, Ursula. *Chronoscisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Isnenghi, Mario. *L'Italia del fascio*. Florence: Giunti, 1996.
- Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typeewriter*. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Ludwig, Emil. *Talks with Mussolini*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1933.
- Luzzatto, Sergio. *Il corpo del duce*. Turin: Einaudi, 1998.
- Mazza, Attilio. *D'Annunzio sciamano*. Milan: Bietti, 2001.
- Melgrani, Piero. "The Cult of the Duce in Mussolini's Italy." *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (October 1976): 221-237.
- Mosse, George. *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Sarfatti, Margherita. *Dux*. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1938.
- Schnapp, Jeffrey T. "Crash (Speed as Engine of Individuation)." *Modernism/Modernity* 6 (1999): 1-49.
- . "Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution." In *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*. Ed. Richard J. Golsan. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992. Pp. 1-37.
- . "Le parole del silenzio." *Quaderni Dannunziani* 3-4 (1989): 35-59.
- Serra, Maurizio. *L'esteta armato: Il Poeta-Condottiero nell'Europa degli anni Trenta*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990.
- Simonini, Augusto. *Il linguaggio di Mussolini*. Milan: Bompiani, 1978.
- Spackman, Barbara. *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D'Annunzio*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Tobia, Bruno. *L'altare della patria*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998.
- Turchetta, Gianni. "Introduzione" to Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Notturno*. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1995
- Valli, Roberta. "The Myth of Squadristo in the Fascist Regime." *Journal of Contemporary History* 35 (2000): 131-150.
- Virgil. *The Aeneid*. Trans. C.H. Sisson. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1986.
- Visser, Romke. "Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the Romanità." *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992): 5-22.
- Weir, David. *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

## BETWEEN THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE: CALVINO'S CITIES AND MEMORY

LUCA POCCI

### 1. *Seeing with the Mind's Eye: A Love-Poem to the City*

In his study on the origin and evolution of the city published in 1961, *The City in History*, Lewis Mumford asked "what is the city? How did it come into existence?... Will the city disappear or will the whole planet turn into a vast urban hive?" (3) An ambitious and erudite work, Mumford's book is a tribute to the city and, specifically, to its major, in fact central role in the history of Western civilization:<sup>1</sup> the role of setting a scenario for what Aristotle called the pursuit of the *good life*. While denouncing the alleged crisis of this crucial function, Mumford shows that knowing how cities have been thought and built in the past is an essential aspect of the collective memory of a society: it is a resource that helps plan the urban life and spaces of the future. A decade or so later, in 1972, Calvino published *Le città invisibili*, a text that aspires to be more than just a *Baedeker* of fictional urban images. The reasons and questions that inspired the writing of *Le città invisibili* are similar to the concerns expressed by Mumford at the beginning of his study. In the preface to the 1983 Mondadori edition of *Le città invisibili*, Calvino reflects on the function(s) we assign to present-day urban spaces and suggests that awareness of the intimate link between the city and the *good life* risks disappearing from the collective memory of contemporary Western civilization:

Che cosa è oggi la città, per noi? Penso d'aver scritto qualcosa come un ultimo poema d'amore alle città, nel momento in cui diventa sempre più

---

<sup>1</sup>In effect, *The City in History* is about a limited area of Western civilization. Mumford himself admits to this in the preface: "As in all my other studies of the city, I have confined myself as far as possible to cities and regions I am acquainted with at first hand, and to data in which I have long been immersed. This has limited me to Western civilization, and even there I have been forced to leave out large significant tracts: namely, Spain and Latin America, Palestine, Eastern Europe, Soviet Russia. I regret these omissions; but since my method demands personal experience and observation, something unreplaceable by books, it would take another lifetime to make them good" (xi).

difficile viverle come città. Forse stiamo avvicinandoci a un momento di crisi della vita urbana, e *Le città invisibili* sono un sogno che nasce dal cuore delle città invivibili. L'immagine della ‘megalopoli,’ la città continua, uniforme, che va coprendo il mondo, domina anche il mio libro. Ma libri che profetizzano catastrofi e apocalissi ce ne sono già tanti; scriverne un altro sarebbe pleonastico, e non rientra nel mio temperamento, oltretutto. Quello che sta a cuore al mio Marco Polo è scoprire le ragioni segrete che hanno portato gli uomini a vivere nelle città, ragioni che potranno valere al di là di tutte le crisi. ... Il mio libro s’apre e si chiude su immagini di città felici che continuamente prendono forma e svaniscono, nascoste nelle città infelici.

(“Presentazione” ix-x)

Like Mumford, Calvino believes that the vertiginous rise of the modern megalopolis makes the question “che cosa è oggi la città?” especially cogent. The proliferation of this new urban form is seen as a phenomenon that causes a significant historical turn, a change that cannot but alter the manner(s) in which we think of, and live in the city. The image of an urban *monstrum* that will grow and expand to the point of coinciding with the whole surface of the world is the ominous future that the authors of *The City in History* and *Le città invisibili* envision and fear. This menacing image, however, is an hypothesis, not a prophesy. For both Mumford and Calvino, the advent and rapid development of the modern megalopolis are not the symptoms of an inescapable urbanistic destiny. Rather, they are the signs of a turning point or crisis that reaffirms, in all its urgency, the problem of the historical nexus between the city and the ancient notions of *civitas* and *communitas*.<sup>2</sup>

The product of a process of disproportionate urban accretion—a process of quantitative growth rather than qualitative development—the contemporary megalopolis or postmetropolis emerges as an example of anti-city. Mumford and Calvino denounce its rise and diffusion, lucidly perceiving its characteristic and paradoxical dystopian quality. If the urban space has always been, throughout history, the natural setting for the pursuit of the *good life*, the modern post-metropolis is, in its turn, the dystopi-

---

<sup>2</sup>In his analysis of the history of ancient megalopolises, Mumford talks about a cycle of growth, expansion, and disintegration. This cyclic pattern would be also applicable to the modern megalopolis. However, Mumford contends that “the cyclic process we are in the midst of is not necessarily a fixed and fatal one. On this fact all wise plans must be based. Our modern world culture, with its ever deepening historic sources and its ever widening contacts, is far richer in still unused potentialities just because it is worldwide, than any other previous civilization” (528).

an scenario that endangers or, indeed, denies the intimate link between the city and the concept/value of civic community. Mumford goes as far as to contend that the emergence of this sprawling anti-city signals that “man” has come to a dramatic crossroads and must choose

whether he shall devote himself to the development of his own deepest humanity, or whether he shall surrender himself to the now almost automatic forces he himself has set in motion and yield place to his dehumanized alter ego, ‘Post-historic Man.’ That second choice will bring with it a progressive loss of feeling, emotion, creative audacity, and finally consciousness. (4)

It is safe to remark that Calvino would have never advocated Mumford’s emphatic tone, let alone his sombre *aut aut*. The quoted passage is imbued with a humanism that, in addition to sounding generic—with its list of vague, undefined faculties/values that humanity risks losing (“feeling,” “emotion,” “creative audacity,” “consciousness”)—is also strongly dogmatic, as the distinction between a fully human ‘historic Man’ and his “dehumanized alter ego” suggests. A strenuous promoter of precision and exactitude, both in writing and thinking, Calvino always sought to keep away from the generic speculations and categorical claims of ideological diagnoses. However, the fact remains that he shared Mumford’s preoccupation with the rise of the modern megalopolis and, as a result, he saw the necessity to reflect upon the meaning of the city and its function at a time of crisis (“Forse stiamo avvicinandoci a un momento di crisi della vita urbana”), a time when urban spaces were becoming less and less livable. This is noteworthy because it proves that Calvino is driven, at least in part, to write *Le città invisibili* by the perception of a specific historical problem. Despite its rarefied, quasi oneiric atmosphere, the text is born—again, at least in part—of an experience of personal angst: the anxiety and disorientation provoked by contemporary urban spaces. *Le città invisibili*, as the author himself put it, is a dream that originates from the heart of the unlivable cities and can be read as one last homage, “un ultimo poema d’amore,” to the city.

What does Calvino mean by “ultimo poema d’amore alle città”? The definition evokes a particular literary genre that flourished in the Middle Ages, the *laus civitatis*. The major exponent of this genre was the Italian poet Bonvesin de la Riva, who wrote a famous panegyric in praise of his city, Milan.<sup>3</sup> It could be suggested that in defining *Le città invisibili* as his

---

<sup>3</sup>Written in 1288 in Latin, *De magnalibus Mediolani* celebrates the marvels of Milan and the virtues of its citizens. Although at the time it was shaken by intense political struggles, the *comune* of Milan is presented as a model, a unique

definitive love poem to the city, Calvino hints at the modes of this medieval literary tradition. However, readers of Calvino's text who activate the literary memory of the *laus* cannot help but see—and perhaps appreciate—the transformation that the nature of such a genre undergoes in the fictional world of the text. Whereas the authors of the *laudes civitatum* would commend actual-historical cities, Calvino designs a text that revolves around a collection of fictional urban images. Unlike the Milan praised by Bonvesin de la Riva, Calvino's cities are objects deprived of spatio-temporal existence. More importantly, in addition to being fictional relative to the actual world of their flesh-and-blood creator, the items of this collection enjoy the status of poetic objects also in the world-scenario of the text, where they are presented as figments of Marco Polo's mind. The fifty-five cities are therefore doubly fictional and doubly invisible. Marco Polo has not experienced or discovered them in some remote corner of the world, the fictional world that he inhabits and shares with Kublai Khan. Just like Calvino in the actual world, Marco has visited and *seen* the cities he describes with his mind's eye.<sup>4</sup>

In light of this, the link between *Le città invisibili* and the medieval genre of the *laus civitatis* would seem to be extremely loose—in fact, almost imperceptible—and, thus, hardly significant. Yet, such a link is more important and notable than might appear, even if it is suggested in an elusive and subtle way. Behind the overall invisible cityscape that Marco Polo proffers to Kublai Khan, there lies the name of a visible city: Venice. In the fictional world constructed by Calvino, Venice maintains one of its historical properties—as Marco Polo's native city - while at the same time, insofar as it is Marco's place of origin, acquiring a special status. Venice is the

---

civic community. The legacy of the genre of the *laus civitatis* persists in the humanist age, as it is attested by the fifteenth-century *Laudatio Florentine urbis* by Leonardo Bruni.

<sup>4</sup>By suggesting that Marco is engaged in a poetic activity, I mean that his activity is a world-creating enterprise. This implies that, within the fictional world of the text, his cities emerge as possible worlds in the basic sense proposed by Saul A. Kripke: “Possible worlds’ are *stipulated*, not *discovered* by powerful telescopes” (44). Kripke re-elaborates and modifies the traditional Leibnizian conception which “was a metaphysical conception: possible worlds have transcendental existence, they reside in the omniscient divine mind. They are *discovered* by an exceptional intellect or imagination” (Doležel, 14). In Calvino’s text, the creative act of the *poietes* is characterized by descriptive economy and search for urban essences. The fifty-five sketches of urban scenarios, a collection of miniature possible worlds, reside in the mind of Marco Polo, who imagines and shares them with Kublai Khan.

indirect source and oblique referent of Marco Polo's imaginary cities. As we will see, the text alludes to the special status of the *Serenissima* only once. Nevertheless, the reason why it is important to grasp this allusion is that Calvino regarded Venice as a sort of ideal type or model. In a short essay that appeared in 1974 entitled "Venezia: archetipo e utopia della città acquatica," Calvino wrote:

L'epoca in cui viviamo vede tutte le grandi città esistenti in crisi: molte città diventano invivibili; molte città dovranno essere ristrutturate o costruite ex novo secondo piani più conformi al modello veneziano  
("Venezia" 2691).

And he added:

Io credo nell'avvenire delle città aquatiche, in un mondo popolato da innumerevoli Venezie... La forza con cui Venezia agisce sulla immaginazione è quella d'un archetipo vivente che si affaccia sull'utopia  
("Venezia" 2691-2692).

This declaration of admiration, if not love, for Venice appeared two years after the publication of *Le città invisibili*. In an assertive and almost visionary tone, Calvino presents Venice as the historical instantiation of his ideal city - the water city ("la città aquatica")—and, thus, as the model and living archetype ("archetipo vivente") for the cities of the future. Quite significantly, Venice functions as a model (prototype) and an archetype also in *Le città invisibili*; it is the historical city that informs and inspires the fifty-five imaginary cityscapes described by Marco Polo. The power of the image of Venice acts upon Marco's imagination and memory, prompting him to remember his place of origin through a poetic act, namely by projecting or constructing a collection of urban fictions. To the (fictional) *artifex* of the fifty-five invisible cities, Calvino entrusts a memorial task that assumes an unusual and estranging character: the task of remembering Venice by transmuting its 'real' or 'historical' image into a series of unresembling and unreal cities.

It is important to emphasize though that the nature of Marco's memorial enterprise is, on the whole, less than laudatory. Rather than a collection of ideal descriptions, the overall cityscape that he proposes to the attention of Kublai Khan is an assortment of utopian and dystopian possibilities. By dissolving the image of Venice into a series of urban fictions, Marco sets out to evoke and remember the archetypical native city without however producing an idealizing memory. Thus, if Calvino's text permits us to establish a link between its fictional world and the medieval *laus civitatis*, it also instructs us to detect the manner in which it deviates from such genre. We could suggest that through the fictional person of Marco

Polo and his invisible cities, Calvino does not seek to resuscitate and revive a dead genre in an imitative fashion; rather he purports to recover and use it in an idiosyncratic and transformative way. The *laus* is stripped of its traditional function - the production of a laudatory memory in the discursive form of the panegyric - and simultaneously ascribed a lesser office, that is, the production of a discourse that honours Venice as a source of good and bad memories.

The fact that the quasi *laudes* that Marco addresses to Venice pay homage to the memory of his city without celebrating or extolling it is an element of major significance. It proves that for the Venetian there are no perfect urban forms. Venice itself is an imperfect model, an archetype that inspires desirable and undesirable visions. To honour the memory of the native city means to evoke and re-imagine, in an oblique and covert fashion, its mundane imperfection. This is confirmed by the nature of the overall cityscape designed by Marco. The collection of urban images that the Venetian describes to Kublai Khan constitutes a variegated utopia and, more precisely, a utopia in the neutral sense of no-place (non-existent place) rather than in the sense of imaginary ideal elsewhere. Consequently, the difference between Marco's cityscape and his native city, within the fictional world of the text, lies essentially in their respective modes of existence. The first stands for the second; it is the imaginary space by which Marco re-imagines and remembers a specific spatio-temporal place, his place of origin. On the whole, the fifty-five imaginary cities serve to transmute Venice into an ahistorical place (a no-place), but not to perfect and sublimate it, that is, not to transform it into the best possible City. In other words, while it projects Venice outside of history, this process of transmutation does not save or redeem the *Serenissima* from its historical imperfection.

We can therefore say that the fictional *artifex*, Marco Polo, uses the city of Venice as the catalyst<sup>5</sup> or springboard for his urban visions and as the

---

<sup>5</sup>Diana Festa McCormick writes that in literary texts "the city often is a catalyst, or a springboard, from which visions emerge that delve into existences unimaginable elsewhere. The city there acts as a force in man's universe; it is a constant element, immutable in its way while constantly renewing itself. It serves as a repository for miseries, hardships, and frustrations, but also for ever-renascent hopes" (15). I have borrowed this idea of the city as a catalyst but I have adapted McCormick's concept to the specificity of the fictional world of *Le città invisibili*. In Calvino's text, Venice functions as the catalyst/springboard from which visions emerge that explore imaginable or conceivable cities. Moreover, as I have argued, Marco Polo imagines and describes these cities not just for their own sake but also for a memorial purpose.

covert object of his memorial enterprise. But what is the implication of the dual status that Marco grants to his native city? Or, more aptly put, what kind of memorial task has he been assigned by his creator Calvino? I would suggest that through the fictional person of Marco Polo Calvino experiments with an image of memorial engagement that presents three distinctive attributes: a fully poietic (or creative) character, a dehistoricizing effectiveness and, lastly, an anti-consolatory inclination. The third attribute derives from the nature of Marco's collection of cities, a collection that contains, as I have noted, good and bad, desirable and undesirable (memorial) visions. The first two attributes, instead, are strictly linked and deserve special attention. They emerge in the opening frame of chapter six, in a dialogue between Marco and his only listener/interlocutor, the Tartar emperor:

— Sire, ormai ti ho parlato di tutte le città che conosco. — Ne resta una di cui non parli mai. Marco Polo chinò il capo. — Venezia, — disse il Kan. Marco sorrise. — E di che altro credevi che ti parlassi? L'imperatore non batté ciglio. — Eppure non ti ho mai sentito fare il suo nome. E Polo: — Ogni volta che descrivo una città dico qualcosa di Venezia. — Quando ti chiedo di altre città, voglio sentirti dire di quelle. E di Venezia, quando ti chiedo di Venezia. — Per distinguere le qualità delle altre, devo partire da una prima città che resta implicita. Per me è Venezia. — Dovresti allora cominciare ogni racconto dei tuoi viaggi dalla partenza, descrivendo Venezia così com'è, tutta quanta senza omettere nulla di ciò che ricordi di lei. (94)

Marco uncovers the dual status of his place of origin by stating that in all he says the native city functions as the *presentia in absentia*, as the undeclared but constant point of reference for his discourse ("Ogni volta che descrivo una città dico qualcosa di Venezia"). As Kublai Khan's reaction suggests though there seems to be no way to discern or decipher, in the discourse of the Venetian, any allusion to Venice. Without Marco's admission, Kublai Khan would have never made the connection between the descriptions of his messenger and the city of Venice. Yet, the emperor is a lucid, if moody, interlocutor who shows a keen proclivity to follow and, often, dispute the verbal peregrinations of the Venetian. The problem for Kublai Khan is that the object of Marco's memorial enterprise is *really* unidentifiable and unrecognizable. What Marco's cities say about Venice—in what sense they evoke and remember it—is beyond the emperor's comprehension.

This is hardly the only problem, however. Even after Venice has been overtly named, the Tartar emperor continues to be troubled by the way Marco's memorial engagement works. In a firm and authoritarian tone, he protests against the strategy of his messenger, exhorting him to talk about

Venice “quando ti chiedo di Venezia” and to describe it “così com’è, tutta quanta senza omettere nulla di ciò che ricordi lei.” The message is clear: Venice should be described directly and remembered as it is in its historical form. Kublai Khan expects a discourse that distinguishes Venice from the other cities—the imaginary cities—and which provides an accurate picture of the first, at least according to Marco’s experience and memory. This expectation, however, clashes with the unfamiliar, in fact estranging, memorial task that Calvino has assigned to Marco. The Venetian recalls and relives Venice by way of a fully poetic act—namely through the creation of a variegated collection of invisible cities—and in the guise of an evanescent and dehistoricized space. For Marco, Venice counts and must be remembered insofar as it is a living archetype, rather than an historical city. The native city is memorable not for what it is, but for the timeless forms—the fifty-five invisible cities—through which its historical identity can be transfigured and transcended. In Calvino’s fictional world, then, memorial work loses its natural and intuitive function. Rather than as an action that aims at re-creating in the present the personal historical experience of a place, it emerges as a dehistoricizing operation and, thus, as an attempt to lift one’s gaze above historical time.

## *2. A History under Continuous Construction: The Cities We Live In and The Cities We Imagine*

And the actual readers? we may ask at this point. What is, for us, the use of the collection of invisible cities and, in general, of the text in which they are included? According to Teresa de Lauretis,

Calvino’s is an open text, that is to say a question-producing mechanism, an ambiguous multilevel message that exposes the contradictions internal to its own system and to the cultural codes it assumes rather than a closed text which is an answer-producing mechanism, a device used to resolve contradictions, to pacify the intellect, to reaffirm—however indirectly—the inevitability or cultural patterns, the presumed presence and order of the world. (17)<sup>6</sup>

This question-producing mechanism, though, has a noteworthy ending. It may not be a resolving ending or tight *closure*, but it is no doubt a

---

<sup>6</sup>Similarly, Domenico Scarpa emphasizes the openness of Calvino’s text by suggesting that “Le città invisibili sono un libro in forma di domanda, un viaggio alla ricerca di una o più identità: il narratore si allontana da se stesso – così come Marco Polo si è allontanato da Venezia, dal suo primo paesaggio matrice di ogni ulteriore paesaggio” (85).

highly motivated, and thus significant, *close*. It should be recalled that in the preface to the Mondadori edition of *Le città invisibili* that I have already quoted Calvino himself had observed

un libro (io credo) è qualcosa con un principio e una fine (anche se non è un romanzo in senso stretto), è uno spazio in cui il lettore deve entrare, girare, magari perdersi, ma a un certo punto trovare un'uscita, o magari parecchie uscite

(“Presentazione” vi)

In *Le città invisibili* the ending provides not only the way out of the text, but also the culminating point of the game in which Marco Polo and Kublai Khan have been thus far engaged. In line with the fifty-fifth city (Berenice) envisioned by the Venetian, their final dialogue—in the closing frame of chapter nine—brings into the foreground an ethical perspective. What makes the ending a sort of textual acme is that Marco appears here, more than elsewhere, as the double of the author, the fictional spokesperson for Calvino. Addressing the Tartar emperor, the Venetian suggests that his catalogue/archive of imaginary cities corresponds to the kind of utopia—a discontinuous and powder-fine utopia (*utopia pulviscolare*)<sup>7</sup>—advocated and sought by his creator:

Se ti dico che la città cui tende il mio viaggio è discontinua nello spazio e nel tempo, ora più rada ora più densa, tu non devi credere che si possa smettere di cercarla. Forse mentre noi parliamo sta affiorando sparsa entro i confini del tuo impero; puoi rintracciarla, ma a quel modo che t’ho detto (169).

To such an affirmative propensity, Kublai Khan opposes a pessimistic response. In his view, the “utopia pulviscolare” outlined by Marco is, in the final analysis, a futile, self-deceiving project: “—Tutto è inutile, se l’ultimo approdo non può essere che la città infernale ed è là in fondo che, in una spirale sempre più stretta, ci risucchia la corrente.” At this point, Marco

---

<sup>7</sup>The expression *utopia pulviscolare* appears first in the title of an essay on Charles Fourier (“Per Fourier. Commiato: L’utopia pulviscolare”) published in 1973, one year after *Le città invisibili*. This essay is part of a series of writings dedicated to the work of the nineteenth-century French utopian writer. The other essays are: “La società amorosa” and “L’ordinatore dei desideri,” both published in 1971. In “Per Fourier” Calvino writes: “Comunque, nessuno più pensa di descrivere una città perfetta, né la giornata dei suoi abitanti ora per ora” (308). And once he has rejected the traditional functions of utopian writing, Calvino goes on to suggest his model of utopia, his *utopia pulviscolare*: “Oggi l’utopia che cerco non è più solida di quanto non sia gassosa: è un’utopia polverizzata, corpuscolare, sospesa” (314).

concludes the dialogue by rejecting the pessimism of his interlocutor and, more importantly, by inviting him to shift his attention and commitment from the future to the present:

— L'inferno dei viventi non è qualcosa che sarà; se ce n'è uno, è quello che è già qui, l'inferno che abitiamo tutti i giorni, che formiamo stando insieme. Due modi ci sono per non soffrirne. Il primo riesce facile a molti: accettare l'inferno e diventare parte fino al punto di non vederlo più. Il secondo è rischioso ed esige attenzione e apprendimento continuo: cercare e saper riconoscere chi e cosa, in mezzo all'inferno, non è inferno, e farlo durare, e dargli spazio. (170)<sup>8</sup>

This is the epilogue to *Le città invisibili*. The fact that it is uttered by Marco seems to confirm that the fictional person of the artifex represents, at least at the close of the text, the point of view of the author. Indeed, one major aspect of the fictional world designed by Calvino is that the reflection about the essence—or ‘cityness’—of the city is less an amicable or friendly game than a dispute, a struggle for the last word. By resolving this struggle in favour of Marco, Calvino emphasizes and values, right at the end, the affirmative ethos that the Venetian opposes to the despairing pessimism of Kublai Khan. However, as I have suggested, the ethical core of the epilogue lies in the clear-cut alternative between acquiescing and reacting to the inferno of the visible, in the implicit exhortation to choose the second possibility (the affirmative option), and, above all, in the priority

---

<sup>8</sup>A similar utopian spirit is found at the end of *La giornata d'uno scrutatore* (1963).

The protagonist, Amerigo Ormea, is a poll watcher at the Cottolengo in Turin, an institution whose function is “dare asilo, tra i tanti infelici, ai minorati, ai deficienti, ai deformi, giù giù fino alle creature nascoste che non si permette a nessuno di vedere” (7). Even in this citadel of hopeless suffering, reasons Ormea, one can discern glimpses of harmony, momentary and discontinuous signs of the perfect and just City: “La città dell'homo faber, pensò Amerigo, rischia sempre di scambiare le sue istituzioni per il fuoco segreto senza il quale le città non si fondono né le ruote delle macchine vengono messe in moto; e nel difendere le istituzioni, senza accorgersene, può lasciar spegnere il fuoco. S'avvicinò alla finestra. Un poco di tramonto rosseggiava tra gli edifici tristi. Il sole era già andato ma restava un bagliore dietro il profilo dei tetti e degli spigoli, e apriva nei cortili le prospettive di una città mai vista. Donne nane passavano in cortile spinendo una carriola di fascine. Il carico pesava. Venne un'altra, grande come una gigantessa, e lo spinse, quasi di corsa, e rise, e tutte risero. Un'altra, pure grande, venne spazzando, con una scopa di saggina. Una grassa grassa spingeva per le stanghe alte un recipiente-carretto, su ruote di bicicletta, forse per trasportare la minestra. Anche l'ultima città dell'imperfezione ha la sua ora perfetta, pensò lo scrutatore, l'ora, l'attimo, in cui in ogni città c'è la Città” (78).

which is accorded to the temporal frame of the present. This last element is especially important because the present in question is, in effect, also the present of the readers. As Calvino's text progresses toward the conclusion, its link with the actual historical background from which it originates becomes more visible and detectable. The "città continue" and "città nascoste" on which at the end Marco focuses his visionary gaze can be read as allegories of the unlivability and disquiet that plague contemporary real cities. With their puzzling uniformity and uncanny ubiquity, the first call to mind sprawling cities like Los Angeles or disorienting conurbations like Kyoto-Osaka.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, the opening frame of chapter nine reinforces the link between Marco's "città continue" and the shape, or rather shaplessness, proper to the Californian and Japanese megalopolises.

Il catalogo delle forme è sterminato: finché ogni forma non avrà trovato la sua città, nuove città continueranno a nascere. Dove le forme esauriscono le loro variazioni e si disfano, comincia la fine delle città. Nelle ultime carte dell'atlante si diluviano reticolati senza principio né fine, città a forma di Los Angeles, a forma di Kyoto-Osaka, senza forma (146).

Leonia, Trude, Proopia, Cecilia, and Pentesilea, the 'continuous cities', are there to prove that *Le città invisibili* is indeed, as Calvino himself defines it, "un sogno che nasce dal cuore delle città invivibili." What is more, they also prove that Calvino's dream is hardly a consolatory or sublimating fantasy. Through their allegorical indirection and vividness, the five "città continue" show how excessive growth and global uniformity undermine the life and livability of contemporary postmetropolises. An analogous absence of sublimating purpose(s) characterizes the visions included in the category of the "città nascoste." Olinda, Raissa, Marozia, Teodora, and Berenice hint at what has become a frequent aspect of modern urban experience: a dismal sense of personal and collective disquiet. However, these visions are on the whole less discomforting and threatening than the ones presented under the label of "città continue." The "città nascoste" remind us that to become engaged in the inferno of the present is not only a possibility, but an ethically desirable option. To do that, one

---

<sup>9</sup>Paola Castellucci contends that some of Marco's most dysphoric visions—Zirma, Isaura, Zenobia, Bauci, Trude—are inspired by the city of New York. Bauci, in particular, would allude to the verticality of New York: "La città sospesa su alti trampoli supera la prospettiva dello sguardo umano: il viaggiatore, dal basso, cerca di individuarla fra le nuvole e non riesce a scorgere la; e gli stessi abitanti possono vedere il terreno su cui si fonda solo con cannocchiali. Bauci non è costruita sul metro della vista umana ma è una città sopra le righe, estrema, a causa della parossistica amplificazione della verticalità" (161).

must learn to discern who and what, in the midst of the inferno of our anti-cities, are not inferno “e farlo durare e dargli spazio.”

We should also note that Calvino invites us to see the nexus between urban form and legibility, suggesting, at the same time, that contemporary continuous cities blur the visibility and importance of that very nexus: given their uniformity and continuity, modern megalopolises are virtually non-legible. In addition to proving that Calvino observed the excessive growth of modern cities with interest and concern, this confirms that *Le città invisibili* is less detached from its historical time than might appear.

A ‘love poem’ to the city as a cultural and historical entity, the text alludes to issues of urban planning and experience that were widely debated at the very time it was written. The non-legibility of contemporary urban spaces is one such issue. In *The Image of the City*, a study published in 1960, Kevin Lynch argued that legibility should be considered a crucial aspect of any cityscape. He described this property as the ease with which the parts of the cityscape “can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern ...so a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern” (3).<sup>10</sup> Lynch proposed to call the legibility of cities “imageability,” emphasizing that the term

does not necessarily connote something fixed, limited, precise, unified, or regularly ordered, although it may sometimes have these qualities. Nor does it mean apparent at a glance, obvious, patent, or plain. The total environment to be patterned is highly complex, while the obvious image is soon boring, and can point to only a few features of the living world. (10)

Contemporary metropolitan spaces lack imageability because, as Lynch noted, “nowhere in the world is there a metropolitan area with any strong visual character, any evident structure. The famous cities all suffer from the same faceless sprawl at the periphery” (94).

Studying the connection between form and legibility (or imageability), Lynch shows that the shapes of many contemporary cityscapes defy our perceptual capacities and, consequently, also our memory. Formlessness and shapelessness are the factors that complicate any attempt to image or remember them.

In the fictional world designed by Calvino, the two protagonists ‘solve’ this problem by shifting it from the dimension of the visible (which is rep-

---

<sup>10</sup>Lynch’s text studies the look or visual qualities of the American city and “the mental image of that city which is held by its citizens” (2). It focuses, in particular, on three American cityscapes: Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles.

resented by the 'real' cities of Kublai Khan's empire) to the dimension of the invisible (the urban fictions created and described by Marco). Form, legibility (imageability)<sup>11</sup> and memorial content are sought in places that only the mind's eye can see and visit. Such a commitment to the invisible, though, is not a gratuitous escapist move. It is a cognitive escape, a move which enables Marco Polo and Kublai Khan to achieve a special, perhaps superior, vision. The key to understanding what this special vision is can be found in "Visibilità" one of the essays of *Lezioni americane*. Here Calvino laments that we risk losing an essential faculty that he defines as "il potere di mettere a fuoco visioni a occhi chiusi, di far scaturire colori e forme dall'allineamento di caratteri alfabetici neri su una pagina bianca, di pensare per immagini" (92).<sup>12</sup> It is precisely this human faculty that inspires and sustains the interaction between the Venetian and the Tartar in Calvino's text. Creating and contemplating invisible cities is a mode of thinking through images. In Marco's case, in particular, the fifty-five urban visions are also a way to visualize, in a circuitous fashion, the memory of Venice, the city of origin. For the Venetian, remembering is a fully creative (poietic) act characterized by an imagistic content.<sup>13</sup>

With his visions Marco transfigures the city of origin, dissolving it, as we have seen, into a collection of estranging images. Venice is recalled by way of a number of oblique reminders that, while lifting it from its historical dimension, transmute it into a composite and timeless (ahistorical) site of memory. However, the ethical appeal that at the end Calvino addresses to the readers serves to (re)introduce and (re)assert the necessity to engage the cities of history, the visible cities. This final move represents an homage

---

<sup>11</sup>It should not go unnoticed that the legibility of cities is but an aspect of the general legibility of the world. In Calvino, as Mario Porro observes, "La fiducia nella leggibilità del mondo si fonda sulla possibilità di visualizzarlo, di tracciare il grafo del labirinto dei tarocchi, visti dall'alto; l'occhio-mente illumina la carta del mondo" (268).

<sup>12</sup>This confirms that in most of Calvino's texts thought (or thinking) and vision (seeing) are intimately related. For Calvino, "l'atto di vedere non è disgiunto da quello di conoscere: vedere è un atto mentale" (Belpoliti 43).

<sup>13</sup>Mary Warnock points out that the imagist view of memory is both an intuitive and a theoretical notion: "Both common sense and philosophy are inclined to describe the process of recall in terms of images. When people say, 'I can see him now' or 'I can still hear the noise it made,' they mean that they now experience something, as they might say, in their mind's eye or ear. And they might explain what they meant by saying that it was not the original sight or sound they now experienced, but an image of it" (15).

to the historical significance of the city, a tribute to its role in the evolution of human civilization. The implication seems to be that the city, to put it in Mumford's words, "is the most precious collective invention of civilization ... second only to language itself in the transmission of culture" (53). Ultimately, then, the reflection on the tension between form and formlessness, shape and shapelessness, as well as the search for a just urban model—a legible and livable space—pertain and apply, by necessity, to the cities of, and in, history.

At the same time, though, Calvino also shows—again through the fictional person of Marco Polo—that exploring the dimension of the invisible, namely conceiving and envisioning possible cities, is an essential aspect of such reflection and search. The point of departure is a first, archetypical image "che resta implicita," an image that one can constantly rethink, recreate and remember in different and discontinuous forms. For both Calvino and Marco, the archetypical image is, as we know, the city of Venice. But what about us? What are our urban archetypes? How do we represent to ourselves the cities that we desire and those we fear? The questions that the text invites us to raise suggest that to be citizens in a full sense implies the capacity to operate on two distinct planes. In addition to engaging actively in the life of visible (i.e. real) cities, one should be able to envision, to build *in interiore homine*, one's own invisible (i.e. possible) cities. This second plane or perspective, the plane of the urban possible, has a major function. It contributes to keep the history of actual cities open and under construction.

*The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario*

#### Works cited

- Belpoliti, Marco. *L'occhio di Calvino*. Turin: Einaudi, 1996.
- Calvino, Italo. *La giornata d'uno scrutatore* (1963), pp. 3-78 in *Romanzi e racconti* (Vol. II), eds. Mario Barenghi and Bruno Falchetto. Milan: Mondadori, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Le città invisibili*. Turin: Einaudi, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Per Fourier. Commiato: L'utopia pulviscolare" (1973) pp. 307-314 in *Saggi* (Vol. I), ed. Mario Barenghi. Milan: Mondadori, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Venezia: archetipo e utopia della città acquatica." (1974) pp. 2688-2692 in *Saggi* (Vol. II), ed. Mario Barenghi. Milan: Mondadori, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Presentazione" pp. ix-x in *Le città invisibili*. Milan: Mondadori, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lezioni americane: sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*. Milan: Garzanti, 1988.
- Castellucci, Paola. *Un modo di stare al mondo: Italo Calvino e l'America*. Bari: Adriatica, 1999.

- De Lauretis, Teresa. "Semiotic Models, Invisible Cities." *Yale Italian Studies* 2.1 (1978): 13-37.
- Doležel, Lubomír. *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Kripke, Saul A. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.
- Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.
- McCormick-Festa, Diana. *The City as a Catalyst: A Study of Ten Novels*. London: Associated University Press, 1979.
- Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1961.
- Porro, Mario. "Letteratura come filosofia naturale" pp. 253-282 in *Riga 9 (Italo Calvino. Enciclopedia: arte, scienza e letteratura)*, ed. Marco Belpoliti. Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 1995.
- Scarpa, Domenico. *Italo Calvino*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 1999.
- Warnock, Mary. *Memory*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.



## RECENSIONI

William J. Connell and Giles Constable. *Sacrilege and Redemption in Renaissance Florence. The Case of Antonio Rinaldeschi*. Essays and Studies 8. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005. Pp. 125. 28 illustrations (8 b&w; 20 colour).

Serendipity is a phenomenon familiar to historians. Sometimes serendipity is found in the past, in an event or person's action that might appear innocuous, but somehow leads to astonishing results because of a unique context or a convergence of circumstances. Another kind of serendipity can occur when an historian stumbles across documents, evidence, or historical connections that could not have been planned or anticipated, but illuminate some unexpected or unimagined aspect of the past. This kind of serendipity is often associated with microhistories, those studies of individuals or events that normally do not find their way into the historical record.

The story of Antonio Rinaldeschi is the welcome result of serendipity and a fine example of collaborative research between William J. Connell and Giles Constable. Independently, each scholar knew of a separate thread of evidence for the story. Connell had uncovered some new historical documents in a California archive that discussed an unusual legal case from sixteenth-century Florence. Constable had seen a series of paintings in a Florentine museum that portrayed a remarkably similar event. Together, they have produced a work that demonstrates the value of collaboration between historians and is an exemplar of historical research at its best.

The event that lies at the centre of this study is gripping and surprising. In 1501, in Florence, a man named Antonio Rinaldeschi spent some time at the tavern called The Fig Tree. The reports do not indicate how long he was there or if he were intoxicated; he had, however, been gambling and had lost a considerable amount of money and some clothing. After leaving the tavern, ruminating about his losses and cursing the Virgin for his bad luck, he passed a painting of the Annunciation. In disgust, he picked up some horse dung and threw it at the picture of Mary. Then, perhaps startled by the immensity of his actions, he fled the city and sought refuge at a Franciscan convent outside of Florence. Throwing dung at an image of the Virgin was tantamount to blasphemy and so an investigation ensued. A boy identified Rinaldeschi as the culprit and he was tracked down in the convent garden. In order to avoid arrest, he tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide, was apprehended, and taken to the Bargello to be tried by the Eight for Security. After apparently confessing his guilt, Antonio Rinaldeschi was hanged from a window of the Bargello itself, rather than at the usual place of execution. Meanwhile, the image was cleaned. A piece of dung, however, had miraculously left a halo around the Virgin's head that would not go away, with the result that almost immediately a popular cult grew up around the Madonna de' Ricci, as the image was known.

Connell and Constable have reconstructed these events from a variety of

sources: the record of the sentence of the Eight, records from the Confraternity of the Blacks that ministered to prisoners about to be executed, and documents from the *opera* that developed almost immediately to maintain the shrine of the Madonna de' Ricci. They also closely examined a painting, dating from 1502, that portrays the Rinaldeschi incident in nine separate vignettes. Thus there are multiple sources for the events, sources which were both contemporary or near contemporary and which, importantly, were generated independently. One of the strengths of this volume is the inclusion of full-colour illustrations of the nine panels of the painting, along with the relevant documents in both their Latin or Italian original and in English translation. This allows the reader to follow the historical analysis step by step, assessing Connell and Constable's interpretation of the evidence.

There is much in this episode that is worrisome. Why ever would Rinaldeschi have been executed? None of his apparent crimes—gambling, blasphemy, attempted suicide—were capital offenses and they were usually met with leniency. Surely Rinaldeschi himself must have been startled when his relatively minor act of disgust and defiance at his gambling losses escalated into a popular uproar, followed by pursuit, a trial by the Eight, and finally a death sentence. This is where the delicate and erudite historical analysis of Connell and Constable shines forth. By reading the episode carefully and finely against the contemporary context, they demonstrate how Rinaldeschi's small act of personal frustration, which in another time and place might well have gone unremarked, in fact exposed underlying social, religious, and political tensions across Florentine society. It was through serendipity that the inconsequential act of an unremarkable individual assumed larger social meaning. By analysing the currents of political and religious discontent in Florence in 1501, the authors reveal this to have been a brief period of resurgent popularist politics and Savonarolan sympathy. As a result, the image of the Madonna de' Ricci which Rinaldeschi had desecrated became a potent symbol for Savonarolan sympathisers who moved quickly to attest to its miracles and to house it in an appropriate oratory. Many other aspects of the tensions of the period produced a context against which the initially incomprehensible sentence and execution of the unlucky Rinaldeschi can now be understood.

This short volume, with only 70 pages of text supplemented by illustrations and documents, is a wonderful example of the art and science of history. As such, it has remarkable potential in the classroom, not only to illuminate and bring to life aspects of Renaissance Florentine society but also to reveal to students how "to do" history. It is an excellent introduction to the close reading of texts, the use of multidisciplinary approaches, the need to examine an historical problem from multiple perspectives and in detail, the importance of reading against context, and finally, and perhaps most importantly, the utter necessity to understand the past in its own terms. In sum, this is an excellent book for students and scholars alike.

JACQUELINE MURRAY  
*University of Guelph*

Vittoria Colonna, *Sonnets for Michelangelo. A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Abigail Brundin. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. xxxi, 197 pp., 2 ill. ISBN 0-226-11391-4 (cloth), 0-226-11392-2 (paper).

This bilingual edition of 103 sonnets by Vittoria Colonna arranged into a collection by the author herself as a gift to Michelangelo Buonarroti (in c.1540) should be of great interest to scholars and students alike not only because of the eminence of its author and recipient, but also because of the profound insight it offers into both the “female voice” in Italian Renaissance poetry and religious thought in mid-sixteenth-century Italy.

The text of the poems and Abigail Brundin’s contribution by way of her introductory essay, translation, and explanatory notes give us an opportunity to examine more closely the cultural world of an eminent figure in Italian letters, her profound spirituality, and the religious climate of Italy at a time when a religious renovation along “Lutheran” lines was still envisioned as a possibility (albeit it, a personal one) for reform-minded Catholics on the peninsula. Thus, in her introduction to the collection Brundin rightly engages with reform spirituality in Italy in the 1530-40s. She argues in favour of a Vittoria Colonna firmly rooted within Roman Catholicism, even on the thorny question of *sola fide* which, as Brundin rightly points out, had a long tradition in Catholic thought reaching back not only to Augustine, but to Scripture itself—a tradition that, incidentally, in Vittoria’s time had not yet been declared heretical by the Council of Trent. Brundin similarly focuses on the importance of the *Beneficio di Cristo*, first published in 1542 or ’43, but circulating in manuscript before that time and certainly part of the discussions among a number of individuals participating in the *ecclesia viterbiensis*, that is, in Cardinal Reginald Pole’s gatherings in Viterbo in the early 1540s. In this context, Colonna’s collection of poetry is intimately connected with the Italian reform movement and with some of the major figures and texts from that movement.

Colonna personally selected these poems as a gift to Michelangelo, to whom she had been introduced in Rome in 1536 or ’38 by Tommaso de’ Cavalieri (26), the young Roman nobleman whose physical beauty so fascinated and attracted Michelangelo. The two struck a strong friendship and maintained it not only through personal contact, but also, when Colonna moved away to Viterbo and then to Ischia, through epistolary and poetic exchanges. The effects of this new friendship on Michelangelo’s works and on his spiritual life were profound. Not only did he refocus his creative energies more determinately in a more spiritual direction, but he also finally left behind the Savonarolan tendencies of his youth (evident in his early sonnets on papal Rome or on death) and his fascination with Renaissance Neoplatonism (so evident in his sonnets to Cavalcanti). Colonna’s collection, which Michelangelo prized so highly as not to allow it out of his sight (32-33), is thus an obligatory stop for scholarship on Michelangelo, as well, for it helps us to understand better the change of direction, or perhaps, the more determined choice of direction that we see in Michelangelo’s works after his encounter

with the Marchesa di Pescara.

As the translator herself points out, Vittoria Colonna's poetry is "spare". In other words, her verses are so tightly wrought that it is difficult to translate them well. This, incidentally, is the same problem we encounter with Michelangelo's poetry, which has often been compared to his sculptural works—rough, unfinished, powerful, etc. In light of this characteristic and of a student's need to understand fully, Brundin has wisely chosen not to attempt a poetic rendition. Instead, she provides the reader with a good literal translation of the poems keeping, as much as possible, the verse structure. While on the whole Brundin does this very well, there are also plenty of occasions when I am not at all convinced that the translation is correct, let alone acceptable. While I would not hesitate to recommend this translation to my undergraduate students, I would advise graduate students and colleagues to double-check with the original Italian before citing it verbatim.

One of the most common "errors" (I put the term in inverted commas because other readers might well not consider this to be an error) is a tendency to change the subject of a sentence. A number of sonnets can be adduced as examples, but I will use just one as my case in point: sonnet 9, composed to celebrate the festivity of the Birth of Mary (8 Sept.). The first tercet, in which Colonna sings the praises of the Virgin Mary as intercessor for us with God, reads:

So ch'ella prega te per noi, ma, o pio  
Signor, prega tu lei che preghi in modo  
Ch'io senta oprar in me sua vital forza (p. 62).

Brundin translates the tercet as

I know that she prays to you on our behalf, but,  
Holy Father, pray to her that through her prayers  
her vital energy may fill my being (p. 63).

My first concern with this translation is that the last verse drastically changes the thought direction of the original and thereby completely loses sight of the "I" active voice in "ch'io senta" ("that I might feel"); Colonna asks that she "might feel" within herself the strength of Mary's life-giving spirit. What Brundin has given us is quite a different effect—Colonna asking to "be filled" with Mary's life-giving spirit. This is not quite the same, especially if (as this volume and the series seek to prove) we are trying to identify female agency in the sixteenth-century.

This same tercet illustrates another recurring "error": the superficially correct but inherently incorrect rendition of a word or phrase. In the context of the poem, the title "pio Signor" refers, obviously, to God; the translation, however, translates it as "Holy Father"—a title generally given to the pope, not to the divinity—and thus this phrase can potentially misdirect the reader. On the evidence of the translation, someone might well argue that Colonna is asking the *pope* to pray to the Virgin Mary to pray to God for us ... While you and I know exactly what Colonna meant, I do not think it serves our undergraduate students well to confuse them with incorrect titles: God is "Our Father" while the pope is the "Holy Father." "Merciful Lord" would have been a much better (and literal) translation in this case. On a more gen-

eral note, the rendition of these verses loses the original “mannerist” circularity of the image—the supplicant asks God to intercede with the Virgin Mary to intercede with Him on the supplicant’s behalf. This loss of circularity is unfortunate because the web of words and images Colonna uses is not only an indication of her “mannerist” style, but also of her stylistics connection with Michelangelo’s own poetry (and here I cannot help but think of Michelangelo’s famous verse “Tu sa’ ch’i so, signor mie, che tu sai” in his sonnet G.60). What is very interesting about Colonna’s style is that, while remaining a Petrarchist, she is also moving forward towards a more “mannerist” and, perhaps, more “mystical” poetic voice.

In the second tercet, the translation of sonnet 9 illustrates another recurring error: the mis-placing of words. The last verse, “questa umana scorza / Serva a lo spirto, e sol lo spirto a Dio” is rendered as “this mortal shell / will serve my spirit alone, and my spirit only God.” Aside from the “umana” rendered as “mortal” rather than “human” and the loss of the subjunctive mood, the greater problem I see in this translation is that the word “solo” in this compound sentence is placed after the comma and the conjunction that separate and connect the two sentences. Because of this, “solo” could not possibly apply grammatically to “lo spirto” in the first half of the compound sentence; structurally it belongs to the second half and so, grammatically, it is either an adjective that modifies the second “lo spirto” or an adverb that modifies either the implied verb “serve” (serves) or the adverbial phrase “a Dio”. My reading of the verse would drop the “alone” and say: “this human shell / might serve my spirit, and my spirit only God” (which makes more logical sense to me); though I admit that other readers might prefer “might serve my spirit, and only my spirit God.”

This type of close analysis and “dibattito serrato” with the translation might well be applied to other sonnets, but this is not the venue for it. What is more important here is to point out that, on the whole, Brundin’s translation is a fine contribution to scholarship, as are also her well argued introduction and her very informative notes to the text. This volume thus contributes significantly to scholarship on Italian Renaissance poetry and to the growing peal of “other voices” rising from early modern Italy.

KONRAD EISENBICHLER  
*Victoria College*  
*University of Toronto*

*Sins of the Flesh. Responding to Sexual Disease in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Kevin Siena. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005. 292 pp.  
ISBN 0-7727-2209-0 \$24.50

The historical study of venereal disease has gained considerable momentum in the last twenty years as scholars have capitalized on new theoretical approaches, better communication across fields, and the growing popular interest on the subject. As Kevin Siena perceptively argues in *Sins of the Flesh*, scholarship on the early modern scourge of the Pox has profited immensely as this venereal disease emerged as

a site of multiple meanings, thereby encouraging the convergence of scholarly perspectives. This rich collection of essays reflects the interdisciplinary and wide ranging influences on the study of the Pox and thus provides an excellent thematic and methodological range on the analysis of venereal disease in early modern Europe.

Kevin Siena deftly navigates such a widespread field of study and gives an excellent introduction to this collection. Rather than merely summarizing each article in order, he smoothly integrates a discussion of the different chapters into the current concerns of the field, showcasing the richness of scholarship and the variety of perspectives on the topic. The fruitful connections that can be made from the analysis in chapters so apparently disparate in theoretical, methodological, and contextual perspectives is a testament to the vitality of the field, the quality of the research, and the judiciousness of the editor in putting together such a strong collection.

Except for an article on Joseph Grunpeck's treatise on the Pox, and Jon Arrizabalaga's discussion of three German works among others, all other chapters focus on either Italian or English cases studies. The Italian ones provide a good variety of approaches spanning medical, social, institutional, and literary responses. David Gentilcore shares his fascinating research on Italian charlatans, including the results of an extensive database of the remedies these medical entrepreneurs sold. He effectively shows that, unlike England where the prevalent shame of contracting venereal disease meant that people often turned to unregulated and secretive peddlers of cures, Italians had excellent access to syphilis treatments from qualified practitioners. Although charlatans very rarely sold syphilis remedies, they did at times provide alternative care that was competently overseen by the authorities. In short, the Italian marketplace for syphilis remedies was well regulated, open, and showcased a variety of alternatives for patients.

Though shame seems to have played less of a role in the Italian treatment of venereal disease in comparison to England, the Pox's connection to sexuality could lead in a specific context to greater institutional control over those who posed a threat to local order. Such was the case of sodomy in the city-state of Lucca. In an excellent example of archival research, Mary Hewlett demonstrates how Lucchese authorities inextricably linked syphilis and sodomy as they intensified their efforts to rid their city of the unmentionable vice. Though information on the sentencing patterns on sodomy cases could have strengthened Hewlett's argument that Lucca focused on foreigners as a specific sodomitical threat, she nonetheless deftly shows that the state started assessing cases of anal syphilis as evidence for sodomy, even going as far as soliciting information from medical practitioners on their patients in order to locate possible suspects. This is an important discovery because it shows both the social implications of syphilis becoming increasingly connected to sex and the concurrent medicalization of sodomy.

Laura McCough, likewise focuses on the institutional response to venereal disease, but from a Venetian perspective that almost criminalized beautiful women, effectively quarantining them—given views on their threat as both temptresses and possible carriers of disease. Again, showcasing solid archival research, McCough analyzes the Venetian response through the creation of the *Converteite* and *Zitelle*, two

institutions that isolated women to prevent contagion. In a context where beautiful prostitutes were seen as both a physical and moral threat to social order, the state's focus on these vulnerable women allowed Venetians to shrug off any possible culpability or sense of individual responsibility for the spread of venereal disease.

Just as venereal disease produced varied institutional responses, so did Italian writers showcase a great range of treatments on the subject matter. Domenico Zanrè examines Cinquecento Tuscan writers and demonstrates that syphilis functioned as an effectively fertile theme for a variety of literature that ranged from satirical treatments and parody, to attacks on specific groups and personal accounts of suffering from this illness. Venereal disease then could be mobilized for a wide range of literary objectives precisely because it was such a malleable metaphor.

In a way, the variability in the uses, responses, and views on the Pox emerges as a central theme in the collection. Jon Arrizabalaga in his masterful chapter on the early medical writers who dealt with the new disease that was besieging European society likewise shows the great range in assessments from a large number of writers who were for the most part either Italian themselves or practicing in the peninsula. Arrizabalaga also convincingly argues that some of these writers came to associate the Pox with sexual transmission much earlier than previous scholars have believed, thus pointing again to the important connection between the Pox and sexuality, a theme central to our understanding of the social implications of this early modern epidemic.

There are few critiques to be made about a collection that is so uniformly strong and thematically balanced. The dominance of Italian and English perspectives, while apparently problematic for a collection that attempts to analyze the impact of venereal disease on early modern European society, might have more to do with both the strength of the research and the fact that most work continues to be pursued by scholars focusing on these two areas. The chapters on the Italian side of the coin displayed good scholarship and effectively showed the complexities, subtleties, and various methodological approaches to this area of research. In a still-growing field, *Sins of the Flesh* will become indispensable reading that effectively showcases both the state of the excellent scholarship being conducted and highlights future directions for research.

CRISTIAN BERCO

*Bishop's University*

Raymond B. Waddington. *Aretino's Satyr Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art*. Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 280. ISBN 0-8020-8814-7 US. \$ 52.75.

Ci si chiede spesso se l'Aretino fu un parassita, uno scrittore di pornografia, un ricattatore, un protettore con una forza scurrile e influente. Certamente Aretino ha imbarazzato molta gente. Il problema di definirlo criticamente è complesso perché quasi tutti riconoscono che, qualunque cosa facesse l'Aretino, era sempre un prodotto differente, nuovo, difficile da specificare. Scrittore pornografico, giorna-

lista e pubblicista, sono le etichette che gli sono state attribuite continuamente, ma sono tutte *definizioni* troppo anacronistiche e pesanti per essere utilizzate nell'analizzare la produzione letteraria dell'Aretino, così occorre ritornare sull'autore stesso per un'esatta chiarificazione di quel carattere così forte da non essere scalfito neppure dal tentato attacco omicida del 1525 a Roma.

Soggetto della presente indagine di R.B. Waddington è l'area di proiezione di sé in cui l'Aretino opera, in altre parole tutto il complesso di qualità innate e acquisite che è interno ma si manifesta esternamente in onore o reputazione, accoglienza o percezione pubblica. Nel Rinascimento la satira venne identificata con la figura del satiro. Il satirico Aretino si pubblicizza come satiro, la composizione di un essere mitico associato al sesso sfrenato e alla verità.

Il critico Waddington afferma che la costruzione dell'Aretino della propria identità pubblica è giunta ad eclissare il valore dei suoi scritti, causandogli un'avvincente fama di ricattatore e di scrittore pornografico. L'uso che l'Aretino fa di una rete artistica di diffusione per scopi promozionali ebbe tanto successo che per un periodo il suo volto fu il più famoso nel mondo occidentale. Ma Waddington difende l'Aretino descrivendo il suo coinvolgimento in un'ampia sfera di produzione e promozione delle arti visive del periodo.

*Aretino's Satyr* è riccamente illustrato con esempi di comunicazione visiva usati dallo scrittore per creare la sua personalità. Ciò comprende ritratti eseguiti dai maggiori artisti e arti minori: incisioni, medaglie con ritratti e xilografie.

L'autoritratto del Dürer rappresenta un momento cruciale nel recupero rinascimentale dell'intero corpo umano. Si rigetta la divisione parziale della figura umana in zone morali più o meno alte, in ragione e istinto, anima e corpo. Tale percezione antropologica del Dürer è la stessa che l'Aretino scopre da sé negli anni 1520 e 30 ed enuncia nella lettera a Battista Zatti.

Il capitolo di apertura colloca il ruolo dell'Aretino come un profeta di sessualità, in un clima di religiosa eterodossia. Nel richiamare l'arte erotica dell'antichità, Waddington mostra un Aretino che ha assimilato le personalità letterarie di Pasquino e Priapo, mentre i *Sonetti Lussuriosi* sono precursori della sua critica d'arte.

Nel capitolo secondo si esamina l'ambivalenza dell'Aretino verso l'industria della stampa e il processo per cui lui si ridefinisce. A Roma l'Aretino aveva scritto come poeta di Corte, servendo i suoi mecenati come un cliente che usa la penna per lodare, biasimare, divertire (lusingare quelli che serviva o sperava di servire con canzoni, commedie ecc.) e attaccare i nemici con le Pasquinate. Anche dopo essersi stabilito a Venezia, il suo primo progetto era di glorificare i Gonzaga. A dispetto del suo disprezzo per la Corte che lui aveva dimenticato e la lode della libertà e onestà della sua nuova vita, l'attitudine dell'Aretino verso il mestiere di scrittore era improntata dal principio del poeta di Corte che riceve un compenso in regalo; e lui non superò mai l'ambivalenza di guadagnarsi da vivere scrivendo per vendere.

L'Aretino apprese tre strategie da Erasmo da Rotterdam che ammirava: prima di tutto l'arte di rivolgersi a una pluralità di udienze, mecenati potenziali nelle dediche dei libri e a un maggior pubblico per vendere; secondariamente il principio della parsimonia d'autore e ciò che può chiamarsi riciclaggio, pubblicando e ripubblicando le stesse opere con aggiunte, revisioni minori e nuove dediche. In

terzo luogo imparò la versatilità nel rispondere a richieste di mercato. Nelle *Lettere* l'Aretino raggiunse la facilità di apprendere come adattare l'estetica della sprezzatura del suo primo maestro, il Castiglione, alla strategia editoriale di mercato del suo secondo modello, Erasmo.

Il capitolo terzo esamina un Aretino orgoglioso di aver creato un nuovo popolarissimo genere letterario, il libro di lettere in vernacolo di un autore vivente. L'Aretino definì il libro di lettere, l'epistolario, come un ritratto e quando stampò la sua invenzione con la propria identità (il suo ritratto) i due elementi divennero sovrapposti. Prima come artista e secondo come scrittore, l'Aretino fu felice di assorbire la lezione erasmiana che le parole possono creare un'immagine vivente dell'autore, ma non vide mai la necessità di esaltare il ritratto scritto denigrando quello visivo. I ritratti visivi si presentano con due mezzi di comunicazione, i ritratti degli autori come incisioni che costituivano una novità molto importante dei libri che l'editore Marcolini stampò per lui, e le medaglie-ritratto che Aretino commissionò e distribuì prodigalmente.

Il capitolo quarto riguarda l'immagine del satiro nel rovescio di certe medaglie annuncianti la sessualità frammessa dell'Aretino e la sua identità come scrittore satirico. Avendo cominciato come poeta di corte, l'Aretino fu profondamente consapevole delle differenze relative alla sua nuova situazione a Venezia e si accomodò di conseguenza, inventandosi la professione di poligrafo. Scelse di sottolineare il carattere dello scrittore sopra gli scritti individuali, proiettando per sé insistentemente l'identità del satiro: sferza dei Principi, censore del mondo, oracolo di verità, segretario (come conoscitore di segreti) dell'universo. Prendiamo come esempio la medaglia di Leoni che rappresenta l'Aretino e al rovescio si legge il motto "Veritas odium parit" (La verità genera l'odio): tale scritto divenne, a quel tempo, un luogo comune per rappresentare la situazione satirica.

Attraverso il Cinquecento la falsa etimologia che faceva derivare satira da satiro fu largamente accettata senza discussioni. Così si comportarono Aretino e i suoi contemporanei. L'autorità responsabile di ciò fu soprattutto Donato, autore del quarto secolo dopo Cristo, con il suo saggio, per cui gli scrittori del Rinascimento furono convinti che il genere di satira proveniva da una composizione in cui gli attori erano satiri, creature nude e lascive che, a dispetto della loro sessualità, attaccavano duramente i vizi degli uomini. Tale associazione di satira/satiro divenne un luogo comune nella cerchia di Aretino a Venezia composta da scrittori, artisti e intellettuali come Sansovino, Dolce, Tiziano, Tintoretto e Salviati.

La visione dell'Aretino di un'accademia dedicata ai suoi principi letterari si sarebbe unita alla sua consapevolezza che la fama letteraria poteva essere creata dalle medaglie-ritratto. Quando scelse il satiro per sua impresa l'Aretino s'imbarcò in un ben definito programma. La persona del satiro è come Pietro Aretino: per entrambi il dichiarare una sessualità innocente e naturale convalida la devozione alla verità e l'odio della natura umana corrotta (motivazione dell'attività del satiro). La sessualità è naturale per Aretino come l'impulso di satirizzare che descrive nei suoi *Sonetti Lussuriosi* in risposta ai *Modi* di Giulio Romano.

Il capitolo quinto traccia la scelta dell'Aretino, ancora probabilmente deriva-

ta da Erasmo, dei due cari luoghi comuni umanistici: i concetti intrecciati di *serio ludere* e il Sileno di Alcibiade. Waddington procede a descrivere lo stile di gioco serio fino all'arte satirica contemporanea per i ritratti dell'Aretino stilizzati in modo da farlo assomigliare a un satiro, evocando la descrizione di Alcibiade fatta da Socrate — grottesco e divino.

Infine lo studioso prende in considerazione l'altro lato dell'analogia di Alcibiade, Socrate come Marsia, reinterpretando la pittura sul soffitto cioè “La contesa fra Apollo e Marsia” che il Tintoretto dipinse per l'appartamento dell'Aretino. L'Aretino è rappresentato come un giudice che decide, dice Waddington, in favore del satiro. “Il supplizio (scorticamento) di Marsia” di Tiziano è visto come un dialogo retrospettivo fra Tintoretto e Aretino.

A differenza del pappagallo di Flaubert o della scimmia di Lord Rochester, la satira dell'Aretino è interamente figurativa, un'impresa personale che lui sceglie per giustificare la sua professione attraverso il sesso e la verità leggendaria del satiro, in seguito modificandolo e elevandolo con i ruoli satirici socratici di Sileno e Marsia. Scopo dell'opera è dare un'interpretazione più comprensiva della multiforme attività di Aretino poiché non ci sono stati finora studi critici di tal genere. Concentrandosi sui decenni centrali della carriera dell'Aretino, dallo scandalo dei *Modi* del 1525 fino al termine della sua collaborazione con Francesco Marcolini, Waddington cerca di riempire quel vuoto e quella mancanza e ci riesce in modo eccezionale perché l'opera rappresenta una pietra miliare per un'analisi sull'Aretino nel suo duplice aspetto letterario e artistico.

MAUDA BREGOLI-RUSSO  
*University of Illinois at Chicago*

Maria Gaetana Agnesi, Diamante Medaglia Faini, Aretafila Savini de' Rossi, and Accademia de' Ricovrati. *The Contest for Knowledge: Debates over Women's Learning in Eighteenth-Century Italy*, ed. and trans. by Rebecca Messbarger and Paula Findlen, with an Introduction by Rebecca Messbarger. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Pp. xxxi, 181. ISBN 0-226-01055-4 (paper) US.\$ 18 0-226-01054-6 (cloth) US.\$ 45

This volume presents various texts on the expediency of education for women by four women and two men from the Italian Enlightenment. As with other books in the “Other Voice in Early Modern Europe” series, the translations are accompanied by introductions that provide analyses and backgrounds to the works, in this case by Rebecca Messbarger and Paula Findlen.

In her introduction to the volume, Messbarger sketches a brief historical and cultural background of the *querelle des femmes* in Italy and then moves on to an examination of how the *querelle* developed and expanded throughout the Settecento. Messbarger asserts that during this period the struggle to reconcile old and new views on women's education was at the centre of public debate, as women became increasingly present in the public academic world and in light of develop-

ing Enlightenment views of the importance of rational civic law, secular moral philosophy, and utilitarian social ethics. Messbarger notes a fundamental shift away from a questioning of the worth of women and their intellectual capacity to a questioning of how much and what women should be allowed to learn. As would become a mainstay of later feminists, the argument to educate women in the Settecento focused on the benefits that would necessarily transfer to the rest of society through women's improved education, especially as it affected their ability to raise children and manage households. In this way, Messbarger concludes that although there was a shift in the debate, most conclusions continued to reflect traditional cultural notions of women as keepers of the domestic space.

The real heart of this collection, however, is the modern translations offered by Messbarger and Findlen. The first is Giuseppa Eleonora Barbapiccola's (ca. 1700-ca. 1740) preface to her translation of René Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*, in which she defends and celebrates women's right to education. The second contains elements from a published version of a debate on the education of women held by the Academy of the Ricovrati of Padua in June of 1723 (the volume was published in 1729.) The inclusion of comments made by two male participants—Giovanni Antonio Volpi (1686-1766) and Antonio Vallisneri (1661-1730)—nicely juxtapose the female voices, all of whom were contemporaries and some of whom were acquaintances with the men. Messbarger and Findlen also include rebuttals of these comments by two women, the Sienese Cartesian philosopher Aretafila Savini de' Rossi (1687-?) and the Milanese child prodigy Maria Gaetana Agnesi (1718-1799). Interestingly, de' Rossi not only wrote a traditional academic rebuttal, but appended footnotes to Volpi and Vallisneri's contributions, which Messbarger and Findlen have also included. Finally, rounding out the collection is a translation of a defence of education given by the Brescian Diamante Medaglia Faini (1724-1770) from the podium of the Academy of the Unanimi of Brescia in 1763, of which she was not only a member, but also a 'princess.' Thus, the volume ends with an oration by a woman who had indeed moved from the academic seclusion imposed on Seicento women, into the centre of the public, academic world of the Settecento.

Findlen and Messbarger are careful to emphasise that the presence of the four women in their collection does not signal a complete and radical shift in the ability of women to infiltrate the elite male academic world of the Settecento. As they point out, women were gaining entrance to the intellectual academies of Enlightenment Italy, and in comparison to the cases of Seicento women who were isolated and confined to what Margaret King called 'book-lined cells,' this is a definite shift. However, as Messbarger and Findlen also point out, very few women were able to gain entry into the public Enlightenment milieu of eighteenth-century Italy. Moreover, when they were admitted to such groups, they were still treated as exceptional, both as scholars and as women, and thus were doubly distanced, both from their fellows in the academy as well the majority of women (11). Finally, as with so many other women both before and after them, the women scholars translated here engaged in what Messbarger calls a "double-voiced discourse," at once defying and affirming misogynist constructions of women in their own works

(18). This presentation by Messbarger and Findlen reflects the continued ambiguity in which seventeenth-century Italian culture regarded women scholars.

This volume is an important addition to the invaluable “Other Voice in Early Modern Europe” series. It presents the voices of women involved in science and academia that are less known to modern scholars than those of other women, such as Isotta Nogarola, Laura Cereta, Moderata Fonte or Lucrezia Marinella, and who engaged in a counter-discourse founded on the developing principles, methods, and themes of the Enlightenment. Moreover, the study is strengthened by its presentation of women from all over the Italian peninsula, from Milan to Siena to Naples. The voices translated here not only illuminate the changing and often conflicting views over women’s education during the Italian Enlightenment, but also give a larger sense of the intellectual, social, and cultural climate of the Italian Settecento. Finally, this volume encourages future research and critical analysis of the characters, the intellectual climate in which they lived, and their motivations. As such, this work is of interest and use to scholars, teachers, and students alike.

VANESSA McCARTHY

*University of Guelph*

George W. McClure. *The Culture of Profession in Late Renaissance Italy*. University of Toronto Press, 2004. Pp. 373 ISBN 0-8020-8970-4 \$55,€42.

George McClure’s project in this book is to “assess the resonance of professional themes in … popular settings” (xii). He does accomplish this, but by far his most important achievement is to illuminate the entire debate over professions in the context of emerging ‘vernacular and public culture’ that was propagated by the rapid increase in the influence of the vernacular presses and their polygraph contributors in the latter sixteenth century. The acknowledgement of popular publics in the creation of culture in the Renaissance is a welcome trend in recent scholarship, and has considerably broadened our appreciation of the complexities of the cultural matrix which was spun out from the humanist core established by Petrarch and his peers. McClure’s work acknowledges that by the latter half of the sixteenth-century, the humanist ‘culture’ forged by the intellectual elite that had fed the presses of scholar-printer-publishers like Aldus Manutius gave way to the era of the ‘polygraph,’ the jack-of-all-trades journeyman scholar, an early form of field journalist and cultural critic. The era McClure writes about was dominated by figures like the playwright, theorist and cultural critic Anton Francesco Doni, whose *Libraria del Doni Fiorentino* of 1550 provides an index to the widespread dissemination of vernacular, middle-brow publications of everything from carnival songs to books of popular jokes. McClure importantly identifies Doni as a middle-man in the advent of a popular culture focused widely on capturing oral forms of popular discourse on the part of vernacular presses like the Gioliti of Venice.

As part of their discourse on popular culture, the polygraphs were interested in the study of profession at all levels of society, an interest presumably tied at least to some degree to their own awareness of emergent forms of profession implicit in

their roles as cultural critics and intellectual mediators. McClure sees an interest in professions and professionalism as evidence of a widespread democratization in Renaissance culture, a “blending of the learned and *volgare* traditions” (178), which recognized that high, middle and low professions were all required to create a complete picture of a well-oiled society.

It is not surprising that the earliest and most complete handbook on Renaissance professionalism was produced by the Venetian Tomaso Garzoni in his *Universal Piazza of All the Professions of the World* of 1585. The polemic of professionalism in Venice was certainly tied to the necessity to preserve and protect the integrity of the Republic by identifying the many professionals at every level of society responsible for maintaining the public and political welfare of the state. Books of professions like Garzoni’s, and the debates about profession found in other popular works of the period, especially in Venice, pointed to the necessity to democratize publics in the hope of maintaining civil order during a period of growing European instability. It is unsurprising that the enormous death book of Fabio Glissenti, the *Discorsi morali contra il dispiacer del morire, detto Athanatophilia* of 1596, which McClure identifies as the flagship of ‘the full symbolic triumph of professionalism’ in the period, was also produced in Venice (in 1596). Literally, the life and death of the Republic was tied to its professional diversity and productivity.

As McClure points out, Garzoni’s *Piazza*, although encyclopaedic in scope and inclusive in outlook, more often reinforces, rather than subverts, social hierarchies inherent in the professions. Interestingly enough, it also often serves to uphold (as do the popular carnival songs and jokes of the period) professional archetypes (the lawyer likened to a pig) prevalent, in my mind, at least since Chaucer created the earliest microcosm of profession in the wonderful variety of his Canterbury pilgrims.

Within this dynamic of professional democratization, McClure points out that one of the functions, and ultimately benefits, of the vernacular press and its polygraph authors was to deal less seriously with serious matters, to convey intellectual and theoretical trends to a wider audience, most notably to women, through jokes, popular lyrics and parlor games that created a ludic dynamic for the study of culture. This area of Renaissance study, games and game-playing as a means of creating and conveying cultural meaning, has demanded more attention since it was first introduced by Thomas Frederick Crane in 1920 (in *Italian Social Customs of the Sixteenth Century and Their influence on the Literatures of Europe*, Harvard University Press). The parlour games described in works by Innocenzo Ringhieri and Girolamo Bargagli were, as McClure fully recognizes, and as Crane did before him, key signifiers of the importance of oral culture in the Renaissance.

While McClure’s interest is chiefly in how parlour games, carnival songs and books of jokes served to highlight the polemics of profession, it is important to remember that no matter what their ostensible subject matter, these codified forms of polite (sometimes impolite) discourse were crucial to the translation into the “nonacademic realm of polite culture … practically every aspect of the natural,

social and cultural world" (53). Understanding the content and meaning of parlour games such as the 'Game of the Liberal and Noble Arts' that McClure highlights in Ringhieri's book (53) certainly forces us to recognize the importance of vernacular modes used to popularize cultural theory outside of academic circles. Such forays into the popularization of intellectual discourse are notable in an age that most Renaissance scholars have insisted was the apex of studious seriousness.

With his emphasis on the importance of orality, games and the cultivation of new reading publics as part of a process of democratization reflected in books dedicated to recognizing professional diversity within Renaissance society, McClure's book makes an important contribution to broadening our understanding of the complexities underlying our assumptions about Renaissance culture. The book is meticulously researched, thoughtful and provocative, and would be rewarding reading for historians interested in print, presses, professions, publics and the advancement of studies in Renaissance popular culture.

SALLY HICKSON

*Queen's University*

Ingrid D. Rowland. *The Scarith of Scornello: A Tale of Renaissance Forgery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Pp. x, 230 pp., b/w illustrations. ISBN 0-226-73036-0. US\$22.50

With *The Scarith of Scornello*, Ingrid D. Rowland not only examines the great hoax perpetrated by teen forger Curzio Inghirami in early seventeenth-century Tuscany, but she is able to accomplish something much more compelling. As the subtitle suggests (*A Tale of Renaissance Forgery*), Rowland fashions her work as a narrative set primarily against the rich backdrop of Renaissance Tuscany and Rome. Curzio's story intermingles with that of popes, leaders, and critics both domestic and abroad. As Rowland notes in the *Afterword*, the importance of Curzio's "discovery" lies not in the question of whether the scarith are authentic or not, but rather that "[t]he controversy they aroused involved Europeans of every nationality" (151). Therefore, in telling Curzio's story Rowland effectively depicts the political, cultural and economic climate of his day.

From the very first chapter entitled 'The Discovery: 1634', Rowland explains how the unearthing of apparent Etruscan antiquities in Volterra could cause such an international stir. Curzio claimed to have found documents written by a certain Prospero of Fiesole, some in Latin and some in what seemed to be Etruscan (a fact no one could then verify). The documents addressed a wide variety of salacious (and timely) topics, from prophesizing the coming of Christ, to Cicero's defeat of Catilina. They even contained a comment on what "[w]as one of the most divisive controversies to split seventeenth-century Christendom [...] the choice between Calvin's doctrine of predestination and the Catholic position that salvation was justified by good works as well as faith" (19). Prospero supported the Catholic position.

Catholics were not the only ones to benefit from Prospero's knowledge. The

mention of the stars Caris, Mor and Turg confirmed that astronomy was a science practiced by the Etruscans, thus it seemed to question the Roman Inquisition's imprisonment of Galileo only the year before. Rowland will often parallel Galileo's plight to that of Curzio and his scarith, as the latter will also defend his work before the Roman authorities.

Undoubtedly, the discoveries appeared to be invaluable, and many stood to benefit from their authentication. Among them was the Grand Duchy of Tuscany as explained in the second chapter 'The Investigation: 1635.' Ferdinando de' Medici had kept a close eye on the proceedings occurring at Scornello. The Grand Duchy no longer exerted the same economic and political power it once had; therefore, it concentrated on its cultural influence, and a discovery such as the one Curzio made could greatly enhance its cultural prestige. With such backing, Cavaliere Giulio (Curzio's influential uncle who now oversaw his nephew's affairs) was able to obtain the publishing rights which resulted in the 1636 Florentine publication of Curzio Inghirami's *Ethruscarum Antiquitatum Fragmenta*. In detailing the quest to publish Curzio's findings, Rowland explains the difficulties they would have faced by way of the Inquisition, its Index of Prohibited Books, the lack of quality Florentine publications, and the common practices they adopted to avoid censorship.

These obstacles were just the beginning of what Curzio and his defenders would face. Chapter three ('The Spy: 1638') saw the debate take on a life of its own once it was disseminated beyond the borders of Tuscany. Curzio and his work faced many detractors, however, until Vincenzo Noghera (the spy referenced in the chapter's title) none of them had accused the youth himself of having committed the forgery (they suspected it had been the work of a more experienced mind). Word of Noghera's theory reached Cavaliere Giulio and he was quickly silenced, receiving monetary compensation never to mention the scarith again. Here, as in the previous chapters, we note how in order to properly contextualize Curzio's reception in Rome we are told (for example) of the power Pope Urban VIII's court wielded in papal Rome, where even an accomplished diplomat such as Galileo could not escape his grasp, and that those who had followed his trial were now reading Curzio's book.

Rowland's work continues in this manner, chronicling the publication of texts which sought to expose the hoax ('About Paper: 1635-1640'), pitting the battle as one where Tuscany and Rome were bitter opponents. Leone Allacci's attack was particularly brutal and very effective. His scathing essay settled the debate in 1640; however, the scarith's story continues as the next two chapters ('The Defender Defended: 1641' and 'Curzio Attacks: 1645') detail the arguments not only of an ever-growing list of critics, but also of those that came to Curzio's defense. Curzio proved to be an excellent advocate on his own behalf. In 1645, he responded to his critics with the publication of *Discorso di Curzio Inghirami sopra l'opposizioni fatte all'antichità toscane*, and while it did little to change the minds of his critics, the manner of his response was judged favourably. By this time the controversy had run its course. Rowland notes that by the end of The Thirty Years' War, in 1648, the scarith debate was over as well.

Rowland's seventh chapter ('A Forger's Reason: 1640') definitively unmasks Curzio for the forger that he was. Among the most amusing evidence to have gone unnoticed was that "the handwriting of Curzio Inghirami and Prospero of Fiesole were virtually identical" (109). The eighth and ninth chapters ('The Sublime Art' and 'Eppur si muove') redeem Curzio as they showcase (among other things) the brilliance of a man who was able to orchestrate such a ruse, and the very reliable evidence that now exists which indicates that "Scornello's impressive hill...is both a likely place for significant architectural remains and a place where architectural remains of some sort evidently existed,..." (pg. 142)

*The Scarith of Scornello* reads like an encyclopedia of Curzio's time. Using the scarith as a type of narratological springboard allows Rowland to provide the historical background necessary in order to appreciate the full extent of the hoax. She does so very adeptly, with a careful anchor to the narrative, never straying too far in order to contextualize the facts. The result is that not only does Curzio's story come to life, but the world in which these events unfold, does so as well.

ADRIANA GRIMALDI

*University of Toronto*

Carducci, Giosuè and Annie Vivanti. *Addio Caro Orco. Lettere e ricordi (1889-1906)*. Saggio introduttivo a cura di Anna Folli. Milano: Feltrinelli (Le comete), 2004, Pp.189.

Vivanti, Annie. *Racconti americani*. A cura di Carlo Caporossi. Con una nota di Anna Folli. Palermo: Sellerio, 2005, Pp.166.

Italian literary critics and academics have overwhelmingly welcomed with warm approval the recent academic focus on the life and also on the numerous works of Annie Vivanti. What remains less known about the new studies, which include those by Maria Truglio, Laura Lepschy, Douglas D'Enno, as well as the two works reviewed here, by Anna Folli and Carlo Caporossi respectively, is that they reflect the collaborative efforts of various Vivantisti (always generously acknowledged). The results, in terms of enriching late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Italian literary criticism are impressive and commendable, to say the least.

Annie Vivanti eludes the most assiduous and dedicated of critics. But, both Folli and Caporossi have, in these two volumes, succeeded in justifying further serious examination of Vivanti, and from various perspectives, not only for the scandalous and titillating tidbits that have generally marked and restrained earlier studies. Scandal and titillation remain in abundance; why not focus, however, as Folli and Caporossi have, on a solid body of work? This was, after all, work that guaranteed Vivanti the incredible status of best-selling woman author in Italy, England and the USA, not only as novelist but as poet, journalist, short story writer, and playwright (with works produced on Broadway). Furthermore, she published in English, Italian, French and German and made it appear effortless to switch languages. Because she assumed that her (mostly female) readers could do the same, her chapters are filled with foreign expressions and words and cultural

allusions. In addition, she envisaged in her intended reader a liberal sense of humour, similar to hers, of course. Beware the self-righteous reader or critic who attempted to transgress these unwritten parameters; a legal lawsuit might follow (and often did).

Her shameless self-promotion, coupled with her sense of humour and her obvious intelligence certainly contributed to the famous, perhaps infamous, relationship with Giosuè Carducci. The connection between the two often serves as a starting point for numerous Vivanti critics. The correspondence between the two consists of thirteen letters, one calling card and sixteen telegrams from her (now conserved at the Biblioteca di Casa Carducci in Bologna). His correspondence is at the Archivio di Pietro Pancrazi: the archive there lists a similar number of items. In her study, Anna Folli also chooses to begin here, following in the footsteps of Pietro Pancrazi, who had previously published the letters in 1951. The attitude of the two critics toward the same material could not be further apart, however. Pancrazi's *Un amoroso incontro della fine Ottocento* reveals none of the critical aggression that marks Folli's *Addio Caro Orco*. Folli, of course, has the benefit of a further fifty years of Vivanti and Carducci criticism to consider, but perhaps what impresses most in her study is the clear intent to call a spade a spade. The titles of the two books already point to this. Gone is the young ingenue in thrall to the elderly *Poeta Vate* depicted in Pancrazi. Instead we see Vivanti, the *chanteuse* of dubious *café-chantants*, the lesbian lover of Enrichetta Toni, the calculating promoter of her own poetry. According to Folli, “[r]isulta uno scenario di fine Ottocento dove Annie navigava da regina, tra *Café-concerts*, cronache mondane, duelli, scandali, fughe e tradimenti, perfino un suicidio a un certo punto; e del resto lei era una vera eccentrica e non fu mai *moderna*”.(p.11) Folli's introductory essay, which discounts right from the outset the often recounted fable of Vivanti's felicitous encounter with Carducci, is solidly supported by a wealth of information garnered as a result of Folli's insistence in all her critical works of going back to the original sources herself, carefully reviewing the material her predecessors have included in their own studies, and even more importantly, just as carefully reconsidering the letters, notes, jottings etc. excluded by others. Folli's writing style is a pleasure to read, and never ceases to impress for the detailed manner in which it proposes new and important material. *Addio Caro Orco* is further enhanced by three articles written about each other by the main protagonists themselves: Carducci's *Liriche di Annie Vivanti* (1890) which brought her into the literary limelight, and Vivanti's tributes to Carducci: *Giosuè Carducci* (1906) and *L'Apollinea Fiera* (1921) as well as by reproductions of photos and a sampling of manuscript pages.

Carlo Caporossi lets Vivanti's narratives speak for themselves. His is not a critical overview of her works, nor even a critical edition of the five short stories he has translated here. Rather, he wishes to introduce the American (not English) Annie Vivanti to a new Italian readership. The short stories he chooses emphasize Vivanti's marketability and popularity in her contemporary circles: *Perfect* (from *Cosmopolitan* in 1896), *En passant* (from *The Idler* in 1897), *Houp-là* (from

*Munsey's Magazine* in 1897), *A Fad* (from *Leslie's Weekly* in 1899), and *The True Story of A Wonderkind Told by Its Mother Annie Vivanti* (from *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1905). The last was translated by the author herself and appeared as *La storia di Vivien* in 1906 and then again in the anthology *Zingaresca* in 1918. As always, the story underwent many changes in its vivantian transition from English to Italian; in effect Caporossi's is the more faithful translation of the original English. Vivanti took poetic license, as she often did, and changed her original manuscript to suit another market. This she did even with her name; thus while she remained Annie Vivanti in her Italian works, in her English and American works she presents herself as Mrs. Chartres, or Annie Vivanti Chartres, or even Anita Chartres. (John Smith Chartres was her husband).

The Italian warning of "traduttore traditore" points to the enormous work that Caporossi has undertaken in translating so commendably into Italian an author (and an Italian writer at that) whose style, no matter which language she chose to write in, never ceases to pose a myriad of problems because it is unique, polyglot, humorous and ironic at the same time. But Caporossi manages admirably. There are cases where he must have struggled with the text; for example the ambiguous English title *Perfect* (was Francesca the perfect one, as Karl remarks? Or did Karl represent the perfect target, as the narrator describes?) loses its ambiguity in the Italian version, *Perfetta*, which opts for Francesca. And in choosing to maintain all names in their original form, Caporossi has the dog Ribs carry his descriptive English name with him in the Italian version, losing perhaps the added element of pitiful condescension towards him (important for the parallelism of what happens to Karl). But these are minor details that a translator cannot help but overlook in order to focus on the more important aspects of a work. For example, Caporossi merits applause for his handling the translation of the plot of *A Fad* (*Capriccio*). He ably succeeds in painting the horrible realities of the boy Cicillo's life, the tensions between rich and poor, Naples and New York; he never loses sight of the important question of the value of a human life and human dignity which Vivanti had painted so deftly and so coldly. These are the same horrific feelings the reader experiences in reading about the ugly urban underbellies described by Jarro writing of Florence and Matilde Serao, writing of Naples. Caporossi does Vivanti's original text justice in the way he elicits them.

Caporossi's little volume closes with a brief note by Anna Folli complementing the introduction by the translator. In these pages, the image of Annie Vivanti confirmed by both Folli and Caporossi is not that of a writer of lighthearted social fluff, as she has often been described, but of a serious author whose portraits of her time merit critical reconsideration. Both volumes make excellent and fundamental contributions to Vivanti studies.

ANNE URBANIĆ  
Victoria College  
University of Toronto

## CONTRIBUTORS

*Sherry Roush* (PhD Yale University, 1999) is Associate Professor of Italian at Penn State University and author of *Hermes' Lyre: Italian Poetic Self-Commentary from Dante to Tommaso Campanella* (University of Toronto Press, 2002). She is also co-editor of *Medieval Marriage: Prudence, Passion, Policy* (Arizona State University Press, MRTS, 2005) and author of articles published in *Renaissance Quarterly*, *Italica*, *MLN*, and *Viator*. She is currently working on a book exploring the ideological motivations behind Renaissance authorial ghost stories, as well as an unabridged translation of Campanella's *Philosophical Poems*.

*Pina Palma* is Associate Professor of Italian at Southern Connecticut State University. Her primary field of research is Medieval and Renaissance Italian literature. Among her most recent publications are "Of Courtesans, Knights, Cooks, and Writers: Food in the Renaissance," "Food and War in *L'Agnese va a morire*," and "Finding her Voice and Returning to the Center: *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucria*." She is also the author of "The Education of a Courtesan: Nanna's Teachings in Aretino's *Dialoghi*," "Marino's *Adone* and the Birth of Poetry" and "The Spanish Muse in Italy: *Tirante el Blanco*, *La vida es sueno*, and *Don Quijote*."

*Laura Giannetti Ruggiero* is Assistant Professor of Italian in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Miami. She co-translated and edited the volume *Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance* published by Johns Hopkins (2003) and has published articles on play, gender, cross-dressing, and *Orlando furioso* in *Italica*, *Modern Language Notes*, *Italian Culture*, and *Sixteenth Century Journal*. At present she is completing a book on play in Renaissance comedy tentatively titled: *For Play: The Ludic Worlds and Strategies of Italian Renaissance Comedy* as well as working on food and the literary imagination in the Renaissance.

*Francesco S. Minervini* è ricercatore all'Università di Bari (Italia), dove insegna Letteratura Teatrale Italiana. I suoi interessi di ricerca vertono sul Rinascimento meridionale (critica e poetica) e sugli aspetti culturali e politici del teatro sette-ottocentesco. Oltre ad articoli e recensioni, ha pubblicato i volumi *Didattica del linguaggio poetico in retore del Cinquecento*. Bartolomeo Maranta (2004); *Tiranni a teatro. Demetrio Poliorcete e Serse re di Persia* di Saverio Bettinelli (2002); è stato, inoltre, co-curatore degli *Atti del convegno Ragion di Stato a Teatro* (2006).

*Michael Syrimis* is an Assistant Professor of Italian at Tulane University. His research focuses on Italian avant-garde and modernism, the intersections of literature, cinema, and technology in early twentieth-century Italy, and the film criticism of Italy's silent era. He is currently working on the book, *Through a "Futuristic" Lens: Aesthetics of Technology and Film in the Works of Gabriele D'Annunzio and F. T. Marinetti, 1909-1920*.

*Timothy C. Campbell* is Assistant Professor of Italian in the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University. His book, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi*, was published in 2006 by the University of Minnesota Press and his translation of Roberto Esposito's *Bios: Biopolitica e filosofia* is forthcoming, again from Minnesota, in 2007. Currently, Professor Campbell's research interests run to contemporary Italian philosophy and twentieth-century Italian anthropology and psychophysics between the wars.

*Luca Poccetti* is Assistant Professor of Italian at the University of Western Ontario. His main areas of interest are contemporary Italian fiction and literary theory. He is the editor (with John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer) of *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative and Knowledge* (Routledge, forthcoming 2006).

---

*Quaderni d'italianistica* appears twice a year and publishes articles in Italian, English or French. Manuscripts should not exceed 30 typewritten pages, double spaced, and should be submitted in duplicate plus diskette. In preparing manuscripts contributors are requested to follow the New MLA Style Sheet.

Manuscripts to be considered should be sent to the editor.

Books for review should be sent to the Book Review Editor.

Please direct all other queries or correspondence to the Managing Editor.

*Quaderni d'italianistica* paraît deux fois par année et publie les articles en italien, en anglais ou en français. Les manuscrits ne devraient pas dépasser 30 pages dactylographiées à double interligne et doivent être envoyés en double exemplaire et sur disquette. Pour la présentation du manuscrit les collaborateurs sont priés de suivre le protocole du nouveau MLA Style Sheet.

Les manuscrits soumis doivent être adressés au directeur.

Les livres pour comptes rendus doivent être envoyés au responsable de la rubrique des livres.

Veuillez adresser tout autre correspondance d'affaires à la Directrice Administrative.

#### SUBSCRIPTION / ABONNEMENT

	1 year/an	2 years/ans	3 years/ans
Individuals			
CANADA	\$ 30 Cdn	\$ 50 Cdn	\$ 70 Cdn
USA	\$ 35 USA	\$ 55 USA	\$ 75 USA
OVERSEAS	\$ 40 USA	\$ 70 USA	\$ 100 USA
Institutions			
CANADA	\$ 40 Cdn	\$ 60 Cdn	\$ 80 Cdn
USA	\$ 45 USA	\$ 75 USA	\$ 85 USA
OVERSEAS	\$ 50 USA	\$ 80 USA	\$ 110 USA

**ISSN 0226-8043**